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A. I. Harris

July 29th 1843



STUDIES IN RELIGION.

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BY THE REV. DR. L. B. SEELEY

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

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OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY THE AUTHOR

AND A PREFACE BY THE REV. DR. L. B. SEELEY

L. B. SEELEY, WESTON-GREEN, THAMES-DITTON.

STUDIES IN RELIGION.

WITH AN APPENDIX
ON UNIFORMITY.

BY THE REV. D. COPSEY,

OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

AUTHOR OF "ESSAYS ON MORAL AND RELIGIOUS SUBJECTS;"

"MANUAL OF PRAYER;" ETC. ETC.

"Ταῦτα μελέτα.."

PUBLISHED BY L. B. SEELEY AND SON,
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MDCCCXXVI.

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WITH AN APPENDIX

ON UNIFORMITY

THE REV. D. COOPER

PUBLISHED BY T. R. SHERLEY AND SON

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TO THE RIGHT REVEREND FATHER IN GOD,
HENRY,
LORD BISHOP OF NORWICH;

THE AUTHOR

(WITH PERMISSION)

GRATEFULLY AND RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBES
THE FOLLOWING PAGES;
GLADLY AVAILING HIMSELF
OF THE OPPORTUNITY OF DECLARING
HIS MOST WILLING RECEPTION,
OF THE ANTIENT AND SCRIPTURAL DISCIPLINE,
OF VARIOUS DEGREES AND ORDERS
IN THE CHURCH OF GOD;

AND

HIS HIGH VENERATION FOR,
AND SINCERE ATTACHMENT TO
THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND,
PRESERVED BY DIVINE PROVIDENCE,
DURING SUCCESSIVE AGES,
IN UNITY OF DOCTRINE AND DISCIPLINE,
AS THE BEST FRIEND AND ALLY
OF THE STATE,
AND
AS THE STRONGEST BULWARK
OF TRUE RELIGION.

TO THE HON. HARRISON LAMONT, ESQ.

SECRET.

JOHN BISHOP OF NORWICH.

THE BISHOP

(WITH APPENDIX)

CLASSICAL AND LITERARY INQUIRIES

FOR ONLY ONE OF THE FOLLOWING: CLASSICAL, LITERARY, AND

A MONTHLY REVIEW OF THE CLASSICAL AND LITERARY

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

IN THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

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PREFACE.

THE only advantage, perhaps, which results from a multiplicity of religious opinions in the world, is the opportunity which is thereby offered for the exercise of Christian charity and candour.

But while a feeling of common infirmity, should incline us to be tender of the consciences of others ; we ought never to be led into indifference, whether the fundamental doctrines of the Bible be received or rejected. If, among the various conflicting sentiments of professed Christians, there be “ old wives’ fables,” which are to be refused ; there is also a “ form of sound words,” which is to be held fast : and if there be “ foolish questions,” which are to be avoided ; there are also “ damnable heresies ” which will bring on their promoters “ swift destruction.”

Of the different subjects which are discussed in the following pages, some are of common

agreement among all classes of Christians ; while others are unhappily the causes of much contention. The object of the writer has been, not so much to defend the tenets of any one particular party, as to state, what he believes to be, a Scriptural view of some of the most important doctrines of the Gospel. He is an honest inquirer after truth, and has no favourite system to uphold ; nor would he ever willingly sacrifice truth to prejudice.

While his own mind is at rest, with respect to all the points herein treated of, he is not vain enough to imagine, that he has attained perfect knowledge of them all : nor is he so bigoted as to deny to others, who differ from him in many branches of doctrine, and of Church discipline, the common name of Christians, or a participation in the common privileges and blessings of Christianity. He has long since learned, that the Gospel knows of no party. Paul and Apollos can only be subservient to a knowledge of, and a union with Christ. “ God is no respecter of persons : but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.” (Acts x. 34, 35.) Nevertheless, there are many

points which, though of comparatively inferior importance, when set in contrast with faith and obedience, are yet of important service as helps to edification, and as promoting the consistent and orderly observance of the worship of God. In maintaining these points, we should aim at being consistent, without undue partiality ; firm, without obstinacy ; and attached, without bigotry.

As a member and a minister of the Established Church, the author speaks the sentiments of his heart, when he commends her as fairer than the rival parties which have seceded from her communion. Having long delighted to unite in her formulary of worship, he can but recommend it cordially to others ; and he conscientiously avows the belief, that whoever attends in a right spirit on her public service, will find it always new, always impressive. Its solemn services of adoration speak the language of the devout soul, deeply engaged in the spiritual and reverential worship of God. In its petitions, some will be found that express the present desires of the heart—some that accord with present feelings. Its offices of praise, also, will well express the gratitude of a thankful heart. So long as Christians

find it pleasing and edifying, to utter their praises in language of warm but rational devotion, so long will the thanksgivings of the Liturgy be repeated with delight and profit, by the sincere and humble worshipper.

If the writer be called upon to offer an apology for sending the following pieces into the world, he would reply that if he did not think them calculated to do some good, he would not have written them; if he did not hope that they would do some good, he would not have published them.

STUDIES IN RELIGION.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

IF we examine the works of God, we shall find infinite wisdom most conspicuously marked on all. Ought we not, then, to conclude that equal wisdom was displayed in the original condition of man on the earth? And yet, if we look only at the circumstances of his present condition, and inquire not, by the aid of Revelation, into the causes which have produced them, the evidences of divine wisdom in this particular instance will be greatly obscured. If we attempt, by the mere power of human reason, to account for the natural and moral condition of man, as a sufferer and an heir of mortality, as sinful and exposed to everlasting misery, we shall certainly fall into very many erroneous opinions; because, in consequence of our fallen state, reason itself is debilitated, and Revelation is made absolutely necessary to give us

correct information respecting the cause of our degradation, and the means of recovery. All reflection on the wisdom and goodness of the Deity, would lead us to infer that man must have been originally in very different circumstances, from those in which we now find him placed ; but how he has become debased, the possibility of a restoration, and the means whereby it may be effected, must all be derived from a revelation from God. It must be important for us to be informed of the relation which we sustain towards our Creator ; hence the Bible in which this knowledge is contained, becomes a most valuable gift ; and by a diligent study of this book, we shall be able fully to acquaint ourselves with God.—A knowledge of the nature of God of his essential being, is not, indeed, imparted in the Bible ; but all necessary knowledge of his character, so far as it may be influential on our conduct, and sentiments, and happiness, is communicated to us.

The word of God contains ample means to enable us to obey wholly the command, “ Acquaint now thyself with him.” But these means are to be used in a proper manner ; there is only one way whereby we can become savingly acquainted with the true meaning of Scripture, and that is by divine teaching, imparted to us by the influence of the Holy Spirit. The natural pride of man leads him to neglect and undervalue this influence, and to lean upon the resources of his

own wisdom—upon the efforts of his own reason ; and thus he necessarily becomes involved in the entanglements of a web woven by his own mistaken labours. Men set themselves to read the Bible with a full persuasion of their own competency to understand and receive all that it reveals, without the aid of divine illumination, and thus they fall into difficulties, and doubts, and unbelief. Reasoning on spiritual things in a carnal manner, the plain path of duty, as marked out in Scripture, becomes to them an intricate labyrinth ; overlooking the great design of the doctrines of the Bible, to make men humble, holy, and conformed to the character of God, they miss altogether the chief end of Revelation ; and are lost in the mazes of disputation on points which are merely revealed in Scripture, as connected with the great object of faith and knowledge, and not as that object itself. They mistake the nature of faith, and the true attainments of knowledge, and receive the doctrines of Holy Writ as subjects to be explained, instead of principles that are to regulate the affections, to rectify the temper, and to guide and influence the whole conversation of a man. The Bible is not given so much to inform us of the particulars of our original condition, as to instruct us in the means of being delivered from the dreadful consequences of our degraded state. We are not thereby made wise on points above the reach of unassisted

human capacity, for the mere purpose of exercising our reasoning powers on speculative knowledge. The end of revealed religion is far more noble and beneficial ; it is the gift of a merciful and gracious God to his ignorant and rebellious creatures,—it proposes to make us happy, by showing us the means of becoming holy,—it informs us that acceptance with God is already procured for us by a Mediator, that we possess an interest in this acceptance by embracing the gracious offer of pardon by faith, and that we become righteous by the imputation of the complete obedience of a Saviour, performed in our stead and on our behalf.—These are subjects, how much soever they may be contemned or slighted by the generality of men, on which our future destiny depends, and with which it should be our chief desire to become fully acquainted.—Let us then inquire in what points the true knowledge of God is important, as to the benefits which will result therefrom.

The knowledge of God is necessary to true faith. We cannot exercise faith in an “ Unknown God ;” the object of faith must be understood, before the grace of faith can be exercised. The very first step in approaching God, or rather previously to approaching him with acceptance, is faith in him ; “ for he that cometh to God, must believe that he is.” (Heb. xi. 6.) But this acceptable faith is not *merely* a belief in the existence of God, it

comprehends also a knowledge of his perfections ; for without this, faith would only be a vague conception, unprofitable and uninfluential. The light of nature may make a man desirous of knowing the character of God, but if he has no other guide in his researches, he will make the most absurd conclusions in forming his notions of the Deity ; hence the multitude of gods which the heathen have worshipped. And in our own land, where the fountain of truth, the Bible, sends forth its streams of living water freely and abundantly, there are many fatal errors maintained respecting the true God, because men neglect to derive all their opinions of the Deity from the true source.

The means whereby the redemption of man is effected, which is the grand subject of Revelation, are so intimately connected with the perfections of the Deity, that any mistake (and what unhappily is more common) respecting these means, necessarily involves also a mistake in regard to the perfections and character of God. Every one must be convinced that what emanates from God, must be in perfect consistency with all his attributes ; and therefore the framers of the different systems of religion, which have been built on mistaken interpretations or hasty perusal of Scripture, by changing the conditions of salvation, make also a corresponding change in the character under which they represent the Deity. Men

are apt to reason on the conduct of their Maker, as they do on human actions ; and self-love, making them partial to their own failings, creates also a partial Deity, exercising only such perfections as they desire, and in a manner suited to their supposed necessities. But this is not the God of the Scriptures. There is a harmony perfectly united and concordant, between all the means of human redemption, and all the perfections of God ; therefore the true knowledge of both is most important ; and the one cannot be rightly received, while the other is misunderstood. In the character of sinners, if we judge rightly of God, we shall not look for pardon in any way inconsistent with his holiness, and justice, and truth ; we shall not expect a restoration to the favour of God, in a way that shall compromise any of the attributes of God. The holiness of God is in direct opposition to the sinfulness of man, and it is this holiness which makes man fear the condemnation which it has threatened against all sin ; and therefore he willingly leaves it out, in the notions that he forms of the character of God. But when he acquaints himself with God, he finds that holiness is a divine perfection, as necessary to the security of his salvation, as the divine mercy ; because there must ever be a perfect agreement and consistency in all the divine perfections, and in all the divine character.

If we look into the Bible, (where alone we ought to look for all religious information,) we shall find that the justice of God, which demands the punishment of the sinner, and yet assents fully to the plea of mercy which seeks his pardon, has received a satisfaction which preserves that attribute uninjured; and that the mercy which is so freely offered to man, is dispensed on conditions which offer no violence to the truth and holiness of the giver, and which effectually secure the obedience and sanctification of the recipient. He who has not equal regard to all the perfections of God, has not the right knowledge of God; he that excludes faith in the holiness and justice of the Deity, cannot exercise true faith in his mercy, because all these perfections are united in bestowing every blessing of redemption on mankind. A partial faith in some of the perfections of God, is grounded on ignorance of our true character and condition, on imperfect acquaintance with the evil of sin, and a low standard of holiness.

The true knowledge of God, as derived from his Word, will make us acquainted with our own character and condition. A mistake here must be attended with the most dangerous consequences; because the pardon of the Gospel is provided only for persons whose condition the Bible describes, and is offered only to such characters; and the promises of the Gospel are made only to characters which are particularized, in

order that the promises may neither be misunderstood nor abused. Now if we do not truly understand our own condition, we can neither rightly receive the offered pardon, nor well apply the gracious promises. But a scriptural knowledge of God will lead us to the most exalted notions of the holiness and justice of God, as well as to the most humble and lowly opinion of ourselves as sinners. And this is the feeling which the Word of God is calculated to produce, by showing us that the representation which exalts the divine mercy and love, enhances the divine justice and holiness ; so that sinners may rejoice, but with trembling. Sin pardoned by a God of inflexible holiness and justice, becomes hateful in the eyes of the pardoned sinner : receiving his pardon from such hands, and in such a way as the Gospel makes known, he can never look on the smallest deviation from the will of God, as a trifling consideration. He perceives that the allegiance to which he is bound by his condition, as a creature produced from the earth by the mere good pleasure of the Creator, and placed in the way of rising to a more exalted state of being—to perfect bliss and purity, demands from him an obedience in which even an obliquity of the will is a contraction of guilt, even failings of infirmity call for shame and sorrow ; and in which wilful transgressions would place him beyond the reach of pardon, and out of the limits of hope, unless a

revelation from heaven discovered the means and conditions of forgiveness, and pointed out the solid grounds of hope. The conviction that these failings abound in his life, and that these wilful sins stain all his conduct, prepares him to receive with admiring thankfulness, with deep humility, with lively faith, all the representations of divine grace, as unfolded in the Gospel. The more he knows of his own character and condition, the more correct are his notions of the Deity; the deeper he sinks in abasement as a sinner, the more ennobled are his apprehensions of the divine purity and truth, as well as the more ardent his gratitude for the divine grace and salvation.

There is such a connection between the knowledge of God and of ourselves, that they reciprocally promote each other; that which expands our minds in contemplating the character of the Deity, enlarges our acquaintance with our own hearts; the clearer our ideas of the holiness of God, the deeper will be our conviction of the defiling nature of sin; the more enlarged our perceptions of the justice of God, the more readily shall we acknowledge our state of condemnation as sinners; the more confirmed our apprehensions of the truth of God, the more shall we dread his just judgments, and desire his compassion; the wider our view of the mercy and grace of God, the more humble, the more thankful, the more holy shall we become; the deeper our sense of

obligation to the love of God, the more circumspect will be our conduct, the more diligent our obedience, and the more productive our faith; the more settled our expectations of the promised presence of God, the more spiritually-minded shall we be, the more ardent in our aspirations after a meetness for the heavenly glory. Thus will our sanctified knowledge bear a growing resemblance to that "path of the just," which is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. (Prov. iv. 18.)

The true knowledge of God will show us the bearing and extent of the relation, which we sustain towards Him. As the work of his hands, we must be subject to all the laws which he has been pleased to establish; as mortal, we must be intirely dependent on Him.—But it has pleased God to exalt the children of the dust to a far higher relation, than mere creatures subject to his dominion and authority, and depending on him for every thing which makes existence a blessing. He has, with the gift of reason, conferred also an immortal principle, a soul capable of enjoying the pure happiness of an endless existence in the presence of its Maker. By this benefit, which distinguishes and ennobles us above all other works of his hands, we are in some degree assimilated to himself: it was in this moral feature that our chief resemblance to God consisted at our first creation, when the Almighty

said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." (Gen. i. 26.) The bestowment of such gifts on man, evinces in the most striking manner the goodness of God; but we shall be much more interested, if we contemplate that affecting display of his love, which has restored to his favour that guilty race which perverted these gifts, and cast away this moral resemblance, and denied their dependence on Him, and rebelled against a subjection to his laws. By this latter dispensation, revealed in the Gospel, we stand in a new relation to our Maker. By our creation we were dependent and accountable; by sin we became guilty, and obnoxious to his just anger; but by grace we become pardoned creatures, and adopted children. It is here that the true knowledge of God becomes of infinite importance to us; because our original condition has passed away, and we do not stand in the same relation to God that our first father Adam did, when he was made in the image of God, and placed in the garden of Eden. God was the Maker, and Preserver, and Judge of Adam: He was also his Father by creation and providence. He is our Maker, and Preserver, and Judge also; but he offers himself in his word in a new character, as our Redeemer, our Father by adoption and grace.

Our hope here, and our happiness in a future state of being, depend on the right knowledge of

God in the above delightful characters ; because as our pardon and salvation can proceed from no other source than himself, so also the graces and qualifications which he requires in us, as sustaining such exalted relations to Him, cannot be attained to, independent of the true knowledge of God. If we know God aright, our own condition cannot be misunderstood ; and an acquaintance with our condition and necessities, will lead us to seek of God those supplies which are indispensable to our acceptance with him ; and the more we know of the character of God, as revealed in his word, and applied to the heart by his Spirit, the more earnestly shall we desire that regeneration, which will restore us from a death in sin, to a life of holiness,—(Rom. viii. 10.) that strength which will enable us to walk worthy of our high calling to be the children of God,—that sanctification which will prepare us for his presence,—that heavenly wisdom which will teach us the divine will, and that grace, daily imparted to those that ask it, which will help us to obey that will. As children we are called upon for a higher principle of obedience, than merely as dependent creatures. Obedience is now sanctioned by infinite obligations, as well as by imperative duty. We love God, because he first loved us ; and we must serve God, because we love him. We are to be subject to him as our Maker, fear him as our Judge, and be thankful to him as our

Preserver;—but we are to love him as our Father in Christ. We have all favours bestowed upon us as the creatures of his hand, and the objects of his care; but we have far more exalted privileges as his children, as heirs of blessedness and immortality.

The knowledge of God must be practical; that is, it must have an influence on the affections, (which form by their bias the characters of men,) and manifest itself in the life and conversation. The mere knowledge of God by itself will not be of any avail to us, unless it be influential and practical. Our notions of God, of his character and perfections, and of the extent and nature of our relation towards him, may be quite correct and scriptural, according to the letter of revelation; but if our only object be the mere attainment of this correct knowledge, we have made no right progress in a saving acquaintance with divine things. Our desires must have a more noble object, and must not rest in the acquirement of clear perceptions and scriptural sentiments; but our aim should be that by these perceptions and sentiments we may be directed to a right understanding of our duty, and to a diligent and conscientious discharge of it when known. It is a possible case, that a man may spend all his life in speculative inquiries in theology, and yet remain without any personal benefit from all his attainments, because they have not

been conducted with the aim and design which should characterize all christian pursuits; and because he has not embraced with lively faith, the facts of that revelation which he has been investigating, nor the doctrines which he has been examining. We may be so well-grounded in the nature of the evidence, by which the genuineness and authenticity of the Scriptures are proved, as to meet all the cavils of the sceptic with unanswerable argument and demonstration; but this is not the saving knowledge of the Word of God: we must know the Bible as *sinner*s, as well as in the character of *reasonable beings*; we must feel our necessity of a Saviour, as well as be able to show that he has appeared in the fulness of time, and accomplished the work of human redemption; we must practise the morality of the Bible, as well as prove the moral tendency of the doctrines of the Bible; we must live under the holy influence of its doctrines, as well as show their consistency with the character of God, and their suitableness to the condition of man. In short, we must have faith as well as knowledge; for although the holy Scriptures are able to make us "wise unto salvation,"—it is only by means of "faith which is in Christ Jesus." (2 Tim. iii. 15.) It is not enough to prove by sound argument that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God;" (1 Tim. iii. 16.) but we must also evince by our subdued tempers, by our re-

newed life, by our holy conversation and godliness," (2 Pet. iii. 11.) that they are "profitable" to us "for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness," that we "may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Tim. iii. 17.)

Many persons contentedly remain ignorant of God, because they are conscious that their actions are opposed to the will of God. These are they who fear and hate the light, "because their deeds are evil." (John iii. 10.) They will not acquaint themselves with God, because this knowledge brings light with it, to manifest and to reprove all evil works. If divine revelation be the best gift of God to man, and if the Gospel be an intire dispensation of mercy, then must every part of the design of God, in that gift, and in that dispensation, be beneficial to the best interests of man, and promotive of his true happiness. The light which the knowledge of God brings with it, is designed to convince men of their sins, that they may forsake them,—to show them their danger, that they may escape from it,—to discover to them the path to endless happiness, that they may walk in it. All these are so many acts of mercy; and he that opposes them by choosing ignorance rather than knowledge, by loving "darkness rather than light," (John iii. 19.) sins against the most engaging display of mercy that could be exhibited, rejects the best benefits that

could be offered, and justly falls under the grievous and heavy "condemnation," which shall take from him for ever the means of obtaining those blessings of peace, which he refused and hated, because they opposed the sins which he loved ; and which shall bring to a final close, that single opportunity which was afforded in this life, to believe and be saved. "How oft is the candle of the wicked put out, and how oft cometh their destruction upon them? God distributeth sorrows in his anger!" (Job xxi. 17.)

Ignorance of God is cherished by some as a means of diminishing their guilt. They desire not the knowledge of the Most High, from a vain persuasion that their accountableness will be in the exact ratio of their religious knowledge. They wish to circumscribe their knowledge within the narrowest limits, forgetful that guilt is imputed where ignorance is wilful. If the knowledge of duty involves an obligation to perform that duty, so also the means of obtaining this knowledge, if placed within our reach, imply an obligation to make a diligent use of them ; and sin is chargeable upon those who wilfully neglect the means. The divine declaration that, "unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required," (Luke xii. 48,) is equally true of knowledge already attained, and of that necessary knowledge which it is in our power to acquire. The "many stripes," which shall be inflicted on that servant, who knew

his Lord's will and did not according to it, shall be awarded also to that equally guilty servant, who cared not what the will of his Lord might be, and whose ignorance proceeded not from a lack of the means of knowledge, but from a disregard of them.

Every gift of God is a talent placed in our hands, for the improvement of which we are accountable to the giver ; and every talent that is bestowed, implies the power in us of using it to advantage, therefore the gift and the duty are inseparable. The divine command, " Acquaint now thyself with him," supposes that the means of attaining this knowledge are in our possession ; and therefore guilt must be incurred where the means are enjoyed, but the end for which they were given is not fulfilled. The word of God repeatedly condemns this criminal ignorance. " How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" (Heb. ii. 3.) " The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." (2 Thess. i. 8.) Knowledge and obedience are inseparable ; the possession of the former, imposes the necessity of discharging the latter. Ignorance and disobedience are necessary attendants ; and when one is wilful, the punishment denounced against the other will fall equally and justly on both.

A true knowledge of God will certainly lead to a desire of pleasing him, of being made like unto him, and of re-union with him. We naturally desire good; and if we rightly understand the nature and character of God, we must desire his favour, and a union with him in everlasting happiness, as the Supreme Good.

God is the fountain of light and happiness; therefore the higher we advance in the true knowledge of God, the more shall we be transformed into the Divine image; and the more deeply the holy lineaments of righteousness are stamped on our souls, the nearer shall we approach to pure felicity. The presence of God must be fulness of joy; but wilful ignorance will debar us from his presence. But mere deprivation of happiness is not the only evil which will result from this ignorance, whether it proceed from the love of sin, or from a mistaken notion of evading duty, and escaping guilt, by continuing intentionally uninformed; it will also be accompanied by the infliction of sorrow and interminable suffering. "Acquaint," then, "*now* thyself with him;" and "besides this, giving all diligence, add to your knowledge temperance, patience, faith, virtue, godliness, brotherly kindness, charity. For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye neither shall be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." (2 Pet. i. 5—8.)

CONFIDENCE IN GOD.

THE weak and dependent condition of man requires for him not only a superior power, by whom he may be preserved and supported, but also with whom he should be made acquainted as an object of unlimited confidence.—The power and goodness of God are visible in the works of his hands, and a knowledge of these perfections is therefore common to every human being; but the designs of mercy which God has purposed towards the human race, must be the especial object of revelation. A right knowledge of God, as the God of salvation, cannot be obtained but by divine communication, and this knowledge is absolutely necessary to the comfort and happiness of every rational being. We find ourselves, moreover, so much dependent on circumstances for our present well-being, and most of these circumstances so intirely above our control or direction, that the knowledge of God, as the God of Providence, is also essential to our peace and enjoyment. If we knew God only as our Creator and Judge, we might justly conclude that he would deal with us in his anger, as sinners against his righteous commands, and rebels

against his authority : but when we regard those wondrous declarations of grace and love which God has repeatedly given us in his word, we may very properly infer, as man is a rational, accountable, and immortal creature,—as he is capable of understanding the will of his Maker, and of yielding obedience to his commands, that He who made him such, and gave him these capacities, and placed him in such relations, would also furnish him with all necessary knowledge of those things which relate to his proper conduct here, and his expectations hereafter. Accordingly we find ourselves in possession of a revelation from heaven, not indeed full and perfect at the time of its first communication, but imparted at different ages of the world, as God saw fit gradually to develop the plan of his divine Providence ; and each successive dispensation has either more fully explained, or partially superseded that which immediately preceded it. And all these distinct revelations combined, show us a Deity worthy of our intire love and service, and one on whom may be placed our unreserved and unhesitating confidence.

True dependence on God must be founded on a right knowledge of his character and perfections ; and as the divine Being is eternally the same, without “variableness” or “shadow of turning,” (Jam. i. 17.) our confidence in him ought to be firm and unyielding. There is every

foundation for a confidence of this kind, whether we regard the power, or the wisdom, or the goodness and love of God.

1. True confidence in God has regard to his power.

There is a very great variety in those troubles which oppress us during our earthly pilgrimage, arising either from the nature of the affliction, from our condition in the world, or from the state of mind in which they find us. Some afflictions are of such a character as to call rather for the exercise of fortitude and patience, then for the aid of a deliverer; such are those losses which affect our property from the common causes of commercial fluctuation, from unexpected changes in the affairs of nations, or from the rigour of ungenial seasons, without reducing us to actual difficulties, or exposure to want and penury. Others are of a kind in which the helping hand of a friend is most desirable and valuable, and in which such assistance will often prove ample and sufficient to remove every difficulty. But in very many cases the trouble is of that nature which mocks all human aid, which causes a man to retire within himself, and to feel that the hand of God is upon him, and that the power of God alone can uphold him under the pressure of overwhelming calamity,—calamity which it is contrary to the order of nature and the course of divine Providence, to be removed; and which the hand

of time and the consolation of religion can alone alleviate. The weight of affliction is also much increased, or greatly lessened, by our condition in the world. Many occurrences are painful to the wealthy, which would be passed over as trifling by the poor man, whom privations have rendered callous to minor troubles, and whom poverty has taught to esteem as comparative enjoyment, what the rich and affluent repine at as afflictive and distressing. Those who are exalted in rank and station are struck by many calamities, which pass harmlessly over the head of the more humble and dependent. The obviousness of this fact has afforded many profitable reflections to the moralist, and given rise to many beautiful similies in the works of the poet.

Our state of mind has also a great share, either in increasing or diminishing our load of sorrow. Pride exposes one man to many wounds, against which humility forms a protecting shield in another. A proud spirit adds force to the stroke and keenness to the edge of the sword of adversity, which humility both blunts and repels. And unavoidable troubles weigh down to the very dust, the heart of him who indulges in melancholy forebodings and fretful repinings, while the elastic spirits of the cheerful and contented mind, shake off the affliction, or rise superior to its injurious pressure.

A right confidence in the power of God will

effectually preserve a man from presumption, as well as from despair. He knows that the might of the Lord is irresistible and unchangeable; but the knowledge which he has also of the divine purposes and conduct in the government of the world, keeps him back from unnecessarily thrusting himself into difficulties, and calling down danger over his head, in a presumptuous dependence on the power of God to extricate him; as well as preserves him from despondency, by an unshaken reliance on the all-sufficiency of God. His confidence in the Almighty saves him from either leaning to his own understanding, or making flesh his arm in the time of trouble. Whether this trouble be such in which God alone can give assistance, or such as may be removed by the aid of friends, or alleviated by the kind and soothing voice of sympathy, "in all time of tribulation" he flees to God for succour, and discerns and acknowledges the divine power in every blessing that he receives.

True confidence in the power of God enables a man to meet trouble with becoming firmness, and to bear up under it with patience, and even with comfort; under every trial however great, exposed to whatever danger, threatened by whatever calamity, his faith never lets go its hold on the divine power, and he still is encouraged to say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." (Job. xiii. 15.) While the heart that is

destitute of this heavenly principle, that has no support but what is earthly, no refuge but what partakes of the feeble and transitory nature of the world, finds that its best support and its chief stay have been but as a broken reed "whereon if a man lean, it will go into his hand and pierce it;" (Isa. xxxvi. 6.) "he shall lean upon" it, "but it shall not stand; he shall hold it fast, but it shall not endure." (Job viii. 15.)

"On its sharp point peace bleeds, and hope expires."

The power of God may very properly be relied on with confidence, while our ways are guided by his holy word, and while we are looking for the interference of his might to deliver us, in the way in which his word declares it will be manifested. But we are not vainly to suppose that the order of nature is to be interrupted by miracles, or the course of providence to be changed for our sakes. The deliverance which we need, and which God may design to bestow in due time, may not include in it any of those things which we ignorantly esteem indispensable to our safety and happiness. Our duty is plain; we are to cleave to God at all times; and if we truly seek, and humbly rely on him, he will ever be found of us, and our hope shall never be disappointed. "The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble: and he knoweth them that trust in Him." (Nahum i. 7.)

2. True confidence in God has respect to his wisdom.

A right knowledge of our own weakness, and of the very limited extent within which the faculties of our mind are circumscribed on earth, will lead us to admit with humility, that it is far beyond the province of our reason to fathom the depths of infinite intelligence. The Christian has an assured faith in God, as governing the universe by wise laws. He knows that the divine counsels and purposes in the kingdom of Providence, are as sure and immutable as those of the kingdom of Grace; and that it must be an essential part of the true happiness of man, to submit without repining to every part of the divine government. The providential administration of the world, embraces all events from the commencement to the end of time; it is this fact which is the ground of our confidence in God, and which constitutes the chief part of the obligation under which we lie, to bow with quiet submission to all the divine dispensations, and to acknowledge God in all our ways. The duty of submission to God, has its first sanction in the relation which we sustain towards him as the work of his hands; but the divine wisdom in the conduct of the world, adds greatly to the obligation of duty, by showing us how closely our happiness is connected with intire resignation to our Maker, and acquiescence in all his will concerning us. A

man may acknowledge the wisdom of God in general terms, and at the same time not feel a quiet submission to all the acts of that wisdom, as affecting his own particular situation and circumstances.—Merely to allow the justice of the divine proceedings, is very different from that faith and reliance on the divine wisdom which enable us to esteem them as right, and best, and most fitted to our own individual case. It is a mark of humility when a man can say with the prophet, “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps;” (Jerem. x. 23.) but it is an evidence of strong faith joined with deep humility, when under the weight of personal suffering, a man is enabled to say, “I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it;” (Ps. xxxix. 9.) “shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?” (Job ii. 10.) “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.” (Job i. 2.)

The passage of man, as a sinner, through a world, into which trouble and disorder have been introduced by his own disobedience, must necessarily be attended with constant exposure to inconvenience and suffering, and with frequent endurance of trials and sorrows. Sin, as it were, maintains a conflict with the divine administration, by the disorder which it has brought into the present state of things. “God is not the

author of confusion, but of peace;" (1 Cor. xix. 33.) and this order must therefore be necessarily infused into all his works; but sin is the parent of confusion, and disorders, where it gains admittance, all that was peaceful and harmonious. Yet amidst all the strife and disorder which sin has introduced, the wisdom of God may be distinctly traced in overruling the course of events, and disposing them so as to promote the designs of grace towards the sons of men, and in permitting only such afflictions—and in a certain and prescribed degree, to fall on the christian, as shall best further his spiritual advantage, and call him off from undue attachment to present things, and prepare and discipline him for the enjoyment of the world of light and glory. A deep conviction of the wisdom of God, as pervading every occurrence, and regulating all the circumstances of his life, will preserve the christian from many heavy hours of perplexing anxiety and unbelieving fears. The true and intire character of a man being hidden all his life from himself, he should rest in the assurance that the divine wisdom has marked out all the parts of his dispensation, as best suited to his individual condition, and most efficient to promote his real interest and welfare. The christian's duty in the time of trouble, is to wait and endure with patience. He is not to repine and fret against the Lord, nor to seek unlawful

means of deliverance. "Set thy heart aright, and constantly endure, and make not haste in time of trouble;" (Eccles. ii. 2.) that is, do not be impatient, and endeavour perversely to shake off the yoke which God has laid upon thee. The ways of God must in very many cases be hidden from us as to their particular cause, but the design of them all is the immortal benefit of those that trust in him. The present conduct of the divine Providence towards us, proves this to be the case; for although we may require more severe discipline than we can account for, or are willing to bear, yet when did God lay more on us than he first enabled us to endure? Have not all his paths been mercy, as well as truth unto us? (Ps. xxv. 10.) Has he not supported as well as humbled us,—comforted as well as afflicted,—delivered as well as sent trouble,—and caused us to rejoice and be glad, as well as to weep and mourn? The experience of every christian proves that wisdom directs the hand of God in every afflictive event, and that mercy tempers the stroke.

"Why should I shrink at thy command,
Whose love forbids my fears?
Or tremble at the gracious hand,
That wipes away my tears?" COWPER.

3. True confidence in God has a constant reference to his goodness and love.

It is a high attainment in the Christian course, when a man can receive both good and evil, both

adversity and prosperity at the hand of God; and yet maintain, in every circumstance, the same unshaken reliance on his providence, and the same belief of his Fatherly care and loving-kindness. Long-continued affliction in those that fear God, calls in a remarkable manner for the exercise of faith in the Lord as a Father. As God, he has all means at his disposal; and we are assured that his mercy is everlasting towards those that love him; and yet he is pleased in the mystery of his will to prepare his people, in many cases, for the heavenly glory by long and severe suffering. Where we are ready to think that the sweet and persuasive convictions of the Holy Spirit, might be effectually employed to correct, to instruct, to reprove, and to maintain the soul in a right posture (if we may so speak) towards God, he is pleased to employ the yoke of constraint, and to suppress our rebellion by strokes, instead of subduing it by unmingled mercies.

It is no easy matter to suffer reproach and calumny, to bear afflictions of body, and loss of estate, and desertion of friends, and yet to hold fast confidence in God; and, under the fullest assurance that he never relinquishes the government of the world, and that every part of his administration is regulated according to infinite wisdom and boundless love and goodness, to look even death in the face and say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." And yet this is not only the

duty, but the privilege of a christian.—Our murmuring under the dispensations of heaven, proceeds from our ignorance of the connection between causes and events. We desire the enjoyment of the presence of God in heaven, but we know not what course of discipline with respect to ourselves, is absolutely necessary, not only to prepare us for this enjoyment, but even to keep alive the desire of it in our hearts.

The natural fruit of error is suffering; and as nothing brings a man into more serious reflection on his ways than the suffering which he feels to be the just consequence of his guilt, can we wonder that God, in his government of rational creatures, should permit them to reap in a certain degree the fruit of their own ways, and be filled with their own doings? The conviction that sin is the parent of sorrow, is so natural to the human heart, that a case of extreme affliction is often regarded as a mark of the divine displeasure for some enormous transgression. Under the Mosaic dispensation, the government of the Jews, as a body politic, was maintained by temporal rewards and punishments,—not as some have imagined, to the total exclusion of all knowledge and expectation of a future state, but arising from the peculiar situation and circumstances of the people, who, after being held in unjust and cruel bondage for a long period, were miraculously delivered, and exalted into a mighty nation, and put in lawful possession

of the patrimony which had been so long withheld from them. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that the Jews should be ever most disposed to look on prosperity and adversity, as respective proofs of the approbation or displeasure of heaven. Thus their great stumbling-block against acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah, was the state of humiliation and affliction in which he appeared on the earth. And they made his deliverance from the death of the cross a test of his Messiahship, saying, "He trusted in God, let him deliver him now, if he will have him; for he said, I am the Son of God. If he be the king of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him." (Matt. xxv. 42, 43.) And even his own disciples were influenced by a similar feeling, when at the sight of a man blind from his birth, they asked him saying, "Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John ix. 2.) And, in fact, many sins do necessarily carry their own punishment with them: they go "before to judgment;" (1 Tim. v. 24.) and happy is it for that man who is awakened by the painful consequences of his guilt, to sincere repentance and amendment. But the general condition of the righteous and the wicked in the world, strongly supports the Scriptural doctrine of final retribution at the day of judgment. How often do we see wickedness in prosperity, while the just man that fears God, is struggling against

the united force of adverse events and bodily affliction.

It has been a temptation to the people of God, in all ages of the world, to repine when they compare the prosperous condition of the wicked and their own state of affliction and trial. David confessed and lamented this sin; "I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death, but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men. Behold these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world, they increase in riches. Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning." (Ps. lxxiii. 3—14.) It was under the erroneous impression that Job had provoked God to anger by secret and aggravated sins, that his friends brought the heavy charge of hypocrisy against him, and endeavoured to prove that the severe afflictions which had befallen him, were the just consequences of his hidden faults. Both Job and his friends were sincerely disposed to justify the ways of God, but he alone rightly understood the nature of the divine government; and while he groaned under the rod of affliction, and was betrayed into many intemperate expressions of sorrow, wrung from him by the severity of his sufferings, and the preverse reasoning and

groundless accusation of his friends, he yet held fast his confidence in the justice, and wisdom, and goodness, and love of God. His knowledge of God assured him that He could not err in the administration of human affairs, and his faith in God maintained in him the abiding persuasion, that however dark and mysterious were the ways of Providence, the designs of mercy and goodness to them that fear God, were at no time at variance with the infinite wisdom which directed and executed them.

The confidence which Job reposed in the providence and grace of God, was of the highest character. Although assailed by temptations of unusual force and continuance—temptations extraordinary in their nature, and strong in the manner in which they were presented, he nevertheless retained his faith, and held fast his confidence in God. We see him deprived at once of all that constituted the honour and comfort of his worldly condition; reduced from affluence to the most abject poverty; from being a prince in substance and magnificence of abode, he becomes houseless and destitute; made at a stroke childless and a beggar; suffering under excruciating agony of bodily pain; falsely accused and cruelly taunted by his friends, who added to their reproaches the endeavour to prove, that the peculiar curses of heaven denounced against the impious and the hypocrite, were all inflicted on Job; and in enu-

merating the evils consequent on hardened wickedness, they aimed at portraying the exact condition of the afflicted patriarch; rebuked and deserted by the wife of his bosom; ridiculed and insulted by his former servants and dependents; with no comfort left except the testimony of a good conscience—no stay except his reliance on God—no prospect of relief except what his unshaken hope in the faithfulness and mercy of God suggested;—yet amidst all this unparalleled load of sorrow and suffering—this weight of mental and bodily anguish—these domestic calamities and relative afflictions, we hear him justifying his sincerity, appealing with a good conscience to the Searcher of hearts, “Behold my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high;” (Job. xvi. 19.) and yet in the main, acknowledging the justice of God towards him, because his faith in the divine wisdom and goodness and truth, enabled him to wait for the day when God would bear testimony to the integrity of his servant: “He knoweth the way that I take; when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” (Job xxiii. 10.) “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.”

Although it is natural for us to desire a justification of our integrity in the sight of man, yet if we are called to be under the cloud of affliction all our days, and thereby to incur the unkind and unjust censures of thoughtless men, as if we were the marked objects of divine displeasure on

account of iniquity, we should not suffer our faith to decline ; but wait in joyful anticipation of the " crown of righteousness," at the great day of decision ; " knowing that the trying of " our " faith worketh patience," (James i. 3.) " and patience experience, and experience hope ;" (Rom. v. 4.) so that we may say with emphatical christian confidence, " Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."

Confidence in God must be attended with contentment in every condition of life. We are told that " godliness with contentment is great gain ;" (1. Tim. vi. 6.) and in fact there can be no true contentment without godliness. The only grounds for real contentment are a knowledge of God, a consciousness that we desire to please him, and a hope that he is our friend. A sullen indifference to the events of life, may be the result of our despairing to alter the course and nature of those events ; but this feeling is very remote from the resignation of the christian, who not only bows with submission to all the will of God, but cheerfully acquiesces in every part of that will. We do not intend, however, to affirm that every christian enjoys this delightful contentment in the same degree, or that it is possessed by any single individual always to the same extent. There are many varieties of christian character and attainment, and much uncertainty in the operation of christian principles, on account of

that depravity which is common to all, and which remains partially unsubdued even in the christian of highest attainments. It is more to be regretted, that a spirit of dissatisfaction and envious discontent is so much yielded to by many that name the name of Christ, and are in the main consistent with their profession ; than to be wondered at, that such a spirit should exist in the heart of the believer. Undue attachment to worldly objects, a false estimate of earthly good, a forgetfulness of the crown of glory, are the chief causes of repining and discontent. If we considered that every station of life has its peculiar trials inseparable from it, that no man "knoweth what is good for man in this life," (Eccles. vi. 12.) and that the true end of our existence is the glory of God and the enjoyment of his presence, we should not fall so often into those impatient and sinful murmurings against the Providence of God.

Besides, we ought to look more at the government of God, 'as superintending our own individual circumstances, and not spend all our faith in the power, and wisdom, and goodness, which are apparent in the administration of the universe. It is comparatively easy to acknowledge God in the superintendence of the world ; but we are bound also at all times, and under all events to say with respect to our own individual case, "Thy will be done !" When darkness envelopes

the designs of Providence, and all things are advancing in a direction contrary to our expectations and our desires, and we seem ready to be overwhelmed with distress,—when our afflictions are many, and we are tried, “troubled on every side, perplexed, persecuted, and cast down,” (2. Cor. iv. 8, 9.) we still have every reason, strong and unimpaired, and every obligation of duty to put our trust and confidence in God, and to exclaim with humble, yet firm faith, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” God is all-sufficient, and able to deliver us; he is faithful, and will not forsake us; and although we pass the time of our sojourning here in much sorrow and many trials, yet as gold is purified by the furnace, so shall our christian graces be more pure and vigorous, and our christian character be more fully established and confirmed; and in the end our hope shall not be disappointed, “for the Lord is a God of judgment; blessed are all they that wait for him.” (Isa. xxx. 18.)

FEAR OF GOD.

THE relation which man sustains towards God is one of dependence and obligation. A merely partial consideration of the condition of man on the earth, whether in regard to his temporal or his spiritual welfare, will show it to be a reasonable service that we should yield to God the best affections of our hearts. The character of God, as revealed to us in the Scriptures, calls for the devoted exercise of every faculty of the mind in his worship. The perfections of the Deity are so blended in his several capacities, as our Creator, Preserver, Saviour, and Judge, that they unitedly engage in his service our faith, hope, love, joy, and fear. The repeated commands in the Scriptures to exercise these powers of the mind towards God, are not sanctioned merely by the authority of our Maker as Supreme—by the eternal right which he possesses of requiring implicit obedience from us as his creatures, but they are also grounded on the wonderful displays of mercy and love which God has manifested towards us as sinners. The greatness and majesty of God, calculated to impress our souls with awe and dread ; and the justice and holiness of God,

fitted to inspire our minds with trembling apprehension, are so tempered by the discoveries of loving-kindness, and mercy, and pity for the human race, as to awaken also our love, and hope, and filial fear.

There is so vast a distance between God and man, with respect only to creation, that the predominant sentiment excited in the human mind, when contemplating God as a Creator, must be reverential awe; but when we reflect that to our character as creatures, is added that of sinners, the prevailing feeling, when we think of God, must be fear—fear of the dreadful effects of his just displeasure. When this fear reigns in the human mind, unmingled with any kindlier emotion, God is regarded only as an angry judge, about to inflict a sentence of condemnation. Such a fear will by itself lead only to despair, and hatred of God; it is the fear which the fallen angels hold and tremble. It is not this kind of fear which we now design to investigate and enforce, but one which is blended with love, one which is accompanied by faith, one which is ever attended by hope.

1. To be in “the fear of God all the day long,” (Prov. xxiii. 17.) is a Scriptural character of a good man. This fear does not regard God as a hard master, who can and will assuredly punish every deviation from the line of duty; but as a gracious Father, whom the heart of the re-

newed man is grieved to offend because of his mercy and love, and whom his spirit fears to offend because of his greatness. The christian is not bound to his religious service by the galling chain of the slave; but the love of God, shed abroad in his heart, forms the sweet bond which keeps him steady in his obedience to the end. The fear of God leads a man to hate sin, as well as to shun it. "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil," (Prov. viii. 13.) says the wise man; and "By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil." (Prov. xvi. 6.) These are the natural effects of the love of God; where this divine principle is received into the heart, men avoid sin because it is destructive to the soul; but they hate it chiefly because it is hateful in the sight of God. In the common relations of life we see how the feelings of love and fear are combined, as producing a desire to please, and an anxiety to refrain from what would give offence, and how they reciprocally strengthen and confirm each other. In the relation which we sustain towards God, as the children of his grace, the same feelings are united, but sanctified to a higher end; they form, as they advance, the character of the christian, and, by producing in him a moral resemblance to the Deity, prepare him for the exalted purity and happiness of heaven where love will be perfected and everlasting.

We are informed by the beloved apostle that

“ perfect love casteth out fear,” and that “ there is no fear in love ;” (1 John iv. 18.) but he is speaking of the fear that “ hath torment,” and not of the “ fear of the Lord ” which “ is the beginning of wisdom ”—(Prov. i. 7.) not the fear which is enjoined throughout the Word of God, and shown to be an indispensable part of the christian character. Instead, therefore, of there being any contradiction in these parts of the Bible, they serve to explain and corroborate each other. Two different and opposite kinds of fear are spoken of ; and they are distinguished by the fruits which they produce. There is a fear in sinners when they approach that hour, which will remove them from the present state, and place them before the tribunal of God ; but this is a fear that “ hath torment,” and is wholly unattended by either love or hope. The whole life of the christian, on the contrary, is spent in the fear of God, and he finds that it “ tendeth to life.” (Prov. xix. 23.) His experience shows the happy benefits resulting from this fear, and therefore he cherishes the principle in his heart, and finds it perfectly compatible with love to God, the object of his fear. The “ life ” to which this fear “ tendeth,” is not only the everlasting felicity of the soul in a future state, which is emphatically termed “ *life* ” in the Scriptures, but also the spiritual health, vigour, and joy of the soul in the present probationary state. The moral

health, and consequently, the life of the soul, depend on the degree in which our relation towards God is known and acted upon; and the fear of God tends to discover this relation more fully to us, and at the same time cherishes every hallowed feeling which results from that knowledge; and prompts to the faithful discharge of every duty, which springs out of that relation and becomes obligatory in consequence of it.

The christian is commanded to love God; and this duty embraces in it every other particular of christian obligation. Love to God unveils to the believer the whole christian life, marks out every path of duty, and points to every obligation; and with this discovery, it affords the most powerful inducement to the purest and most faithful discharge of every known duty. To spiritual knowledge, love superadds spiritual strength; and the fear of God exercises the most salutary influence over both the knowledge and the power, leading the former to increase the activity of the latter, and making the latter conscientiously act in intire unison with the former.—But although the fear of God is quite compatible with love to God, and both principles are blended in the heart of the christian; yet they are not found in all in equal degrees. Christianity is adapted to the moral condition of every man, but it does not alter the individual character of those who receive it, so as to leave no traces of their natural dispositions and prevailing

inclinations. On the contrary, it acts with these dispositions and inclinations, and guides and sanctifies them, and furnishes graces of heavenly origin to suit in degree and quality the natural temperament and constitution of men. Hence it is that the fear of God varies in its degree and evidence in different persons. Some require a fear which seems almost to exclude love, a fear which is as a chain to keep them by restraint from sin.

The positive command of God compels some persons to attend to the worship of God, while at the same time they find but a small portion of real pleasure in it, and would often omit it, were not their consciences too tender to allow of the neglect. But with this want of delight and enjoyment in the worship of God, there is not a satisfactory regard of the deficiency; they really wish it were otherwise, and strive against it; but the love of the world ever rises to put down the nascent principle of the love of God; and they proceed on the journey of life, possessing too much religious feeling to be happy in the intire neglect of religious services, and too much worldly mindedness to renounce all for Christ.

How different is this struggle between the depraved inclination and the enlightened conscience—between the fear of God and the love of the world, from the unreserved surrender of the heart and life of him in whom the fear of God

is blended with love to God. Represent to yourselves a christian toiling all the day in the pursuits of his worldly calling,—suffering under all the vanity and vexation of life,—conflicting in secret with the lusts of his own heart, and openly with the snares of the world and the wiles of Satan. See him resolutely going forward amid all these oppositions: he is cheerful, because he believes God to be his Father, and looks for heaven as his home. See him anticipating the return of those hours, which are to be devoted to the public or the private worship of God: he longs for the silent calm of retirement in the closet, or he thirsts for the cheering services of the sanctuary,—he loves to enter its well-known gates,—the worship of God is his rest, his delight, his privilege, his refreshment.—Then turn to the man who is constrained by slavish fear to the observance—the formal observance of religious duties. What an affecting contrast! The appointed time for private devotion arrives unlooked for, undesired; it is regularly observed, because his conscience is scrupulous and has a loud voice of terror. The day which God especially blessed, returns; the services of that day are looked upon as tasks that must be performed, as burdens which must be borne; he *bears with* the worship of God; it is an effort of patience with him. At the close he says to his conscience which exacts the minutiae of formal attendance, ‘I have been

to the House of God,—I have prayed,—I have heard the Law and Testimony :—But this is all ; his heart was not engaged ; he found no delight ; his conscience made him afraid and ashamed of claiming the promises of God to the contrite and broken heart ; he could only deprecate the anger of God, and yet not find in his heart to seek the mercy of God in the only way in which it is to be found. He spends the Sabbath in a sort of *negative goodness* ; if his body and mind are not actively sinning, he is satisfied.

Would to God that every individual, who finds this unhappy case the counterpart of his own character, might be led truly to fear that God, at whose terrible justice he now trembles, but on whose mercy he places no reliance,—to fear him, without that tormenting apprehension, which excludes love, and faith, and hope, because it is unaccompanied with any desire to please God, because it slights the mercy of God, if so be he may only escape his anger ; and because, while it desires heaven as an exemption from deserved suffering, it holds in light estimation the sanctification of that Spirit, which can alone prepare him for the joys and purity of the heavenly state !

2. The true fear of God is inconsistent with the indulgence of suspicious fears and hard thoughts of God. When we think of the power and justice of God, and fear Him, we should also remember his love and mercy, that we may have

faith in him. The Scriptural command is, "Ye that fear the Lord, trust in the Lord." (Ps. cxv. 11.) Fear, joined with faith, makes the christian calm and peaceful. Ask him what principle it is that thus preserves him in perfect peace, and he will reply : ' I am in covenant with him who sends health and sickness, life and death, as seemeth good to his wisdom. I must not inquire unwisely of his Providence, as if I doubted his faithfulness. He will never cancel his promises, or violate the terms of his own covenant, I am at peace, because he pledges his word to guide me by a right way. He seeth the end from the beginning, therefore I cheerfully commit all my concerns into his hands, and leave them to his disposal.'

The fear of God must lead to this faith in his Providence, because distrust of his goodness and care excites his just displeasure ; and this is what the fear of God teaches us to avoid. A due sense of the majesty of God in the heart, includes a regard to all his perfections ; to his mercy, as well as to his power ; to his loving-kindness, as well as to his justice ; to his wisdom, as well as to his infinite purity. There is a fear which is attended with discontent and repining, because it has a regard only to the power of God as marking out and assigning an irreversible lot to men ; and a guilty conscience suggests only hard terms, from a Being whose power is as resistless as his

justice is inflexible. But the fear of God, which is joined with faith in him—faith, not in God absolutely and irrespective of a Mediator, but faith in God manifested in the flesh, displaying his character to us in the mediation of Jesus Christ—leads a man both to “hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.” (Lam. iii. 26.) Here the christian finds firm support for his faith, and rest from all his anxiety and fears.

The fear of God must also lead to faith in his grace, because unbelief refuses to give God the glory of his salvation; and the withholding of this glory is especially opposed by the fear of God, which is jealous for the divine honour in all things, and peculiarly so in the redemption of man. When faith is not in due exercise with fear, the latter fills the mind with gloomy doubts, arising from a consideration of our guilt and unworthiness, unconnected with a regard to the mediation of Christ. We forget that God gives salvation to the unworthy, and that the Gospel is sent to the unworthy and guilty, and that the blood of Christ can cleanse from all sin. If we reflect on God simply as our Maker and our Judge, we must tremble with all the apprehensions which a guilty conscience can produce, and our fear of God will be accompanied with aversion, because it is inseparable from distrust. But if our faith have for its object “God in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto

them," (2 Cor. v. 19.) our fear then assumes a different character: we fear to weary that "long-suffering" which "is salvation," (2 Pet. iii. 15.) to grieve that Spirit which strives with our rebellious hearts, or to condemn that grace which is the foundation of our faith, and the source of our hope. Thus fear is nourished and promoted by faith, and not destroyed. True confidence in God never casts off a reverential awe of his majesty, and holiness, and truth, "for (*even*)¹ our God is a consuming fire." (Heb. xii. 29.) That faith (so called) which approaches the dread God with familiarity and unhallowed boldness, may well be suspected of deficiency in the genuine properties of true faith. The confirmed christian, who has attained, through grace, to the spirit of adoption, and calls God "Father," is cautioned to "pass the time of sojourning here in fear." (1 Pet. i. 17.) The assurance of pardon, which the Gospel affords, does not weaken in his mind the principle of religious fear; on the contrary, the recollection of his guilt, of his desert, and of the unmerited favour which he has received, cherishes deep humility in his heart, and true humility is the parent of religious fear. A rightly constituted mind continues to fear that Being, whom mercy and grace have taught him to love.

3. A scriptural fear of God is attended by hope.

¹ Καὶ γὰρ, &c. So it should be translated.

When David contemplated the nature and demerit of sin, he exclaimed, "If thou Lord, shouldest mark iniquities; O Lord, who shall stand?" (Ps. cxxx. 3.) But when he remembered the gracious declarations which God had given, that he would pardon iniquity, transgression, and sin, he rested with gladness on the divine promise, and his painful apprehension became a filial fear, attended by hope. "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope." (Ps. cxxx. 4, 5.) It is the assured belief in the forgiveness of sins, through a Médiator, that produces a filial fear of God in the heart of the christian. There is a Scriptural declaration, calculated to fill the human heart with terror or with joy, with fear or with hope, with dismay or with peace,—the pledge of the sinner's destruction, and the basis of the believer's salvation: It is, that "*God spared not his own Son.*" If he spared not his only Son, when he appeared in the form of sinful man, as a substitute for the sinner, how shall mortal sinners, unprotected by Christ's mediation, escape! If also, he spared not his only Son, how shall he not with him freely give his children all things.

The fear which trembles before the Majesty, and Power, and Holiness, and Justice of God, as opposed to sin, must tend to excite the brightest hope in the mind, when all these perfections are

known to be engaged to bless and save the soul whose sins are forgiven. Hope especially counteracts the fear which "hath torment"; for while the latter apprehends only the dreaded consequences of guilt, the former turns with cheering expectation to the brighter prospects which the Gospel discloses. There is no painful apprehension that fear can excite, which is not met by a pleasing expectation which hope produces. And therefore hope well accords with the maintenance of true Scriptural fear in the soul; hope might degenerate into presumption and carelessness, but being chastised by fear, it is preserved bright and unsullied; and fear might be overcharged with anxiety, which hope tends to dispel. When the fear of God is duly exercised in the degree of Scriptural requirement, the sweet solace of christian hope is unimpaired; but when the latter is weakened by the failure of the former, fear assumes a painful character, and thus what injures the one, redounds also to the hurt of the other. They either mutually strengthen or debilitate; there is a community of interests between them, which does not allow of a partial benefit or disadvantage resulting to either, without an equal participation by both. "When Ephraim spake trembling, he exalted himself in Israel; but when he offended in Baal, he died." (Hos. xiii. 1.) So long as the fear of God preserved his humility, he was honoured with the divine approbation, and

was "exalted" in that hope which raised him to a high advancement in the divine life; but when he cast off this fear, and turned after vain idols, his glory was lost, his hope was extinguished; he died as to all the purposes and duties and enjoyments and expectations of the divine life.

A regard to our present peace, as well as to the hope of everlasting happiness, should incite us to be in the "fear of God all the day long;" for how can we rightly enjoy those mercies, which we feel not assured to receive as marks of divine favour and love; or how can we be animated in our Christian course by the offers of divine grace, which we cannot embrace, because our consciences testify that our fear of the divine displeasure is unaccompanied by an earnest desire to obtain the divine approval, and that our hope is thereby debased into a selfish wish to escape punishment, instead of being a heavenly principle which longs for a growing resemblance to the divine character, as well as for the enjoyment of the divine glory?—The fear of God will also be the best preservative against a tormenting fear of death. This fear may indeed arise so much from constitutional character, as never to be intirely obliterated; but it may be diminished in a great degree, and much of its painful nature removed. Death ought ever to be regarded as a mark of the divine displeasure, originally denounced against sin; but the hope of the Gospel mitigates this

dread, and assures us that the issue shall be glorious, although the circumstances be appalling,—that the end shall be happy, although the way be gloomy and distressing. The fear of death sometimes keeps the Christian in bondage all his lifetime. He finds it harder to die by faith, (as has been well observed,) than to live by faith. And when his hope is very low through this fear, he sometimes attempts to quiet his apprehensions and allay his dread, by reflecting that he is only exposed to that lot of humanity which is common to the species,—that all others are mortal as well as himself,—that as death is inevitable, his fears are unreasonable and useless. But this “philosophy and vain deceit,” which is “after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ,” (Colos. ii. 8.) only defers the trouble for a time, and then it returns with unabated force; because his reasoning has only confirmed the certainty of his suffering what he can but regard with fearful apprehension. It is only when he rightly understands and receives the Gospel, and believes that God has thoughts of love towards him,—that the Saviour has appeared on earth and has completed the work of human redemption,—and that he will, as an essential part of this redemption, restore his followers from the corruption and dishonour of the grave, and give them an inheritance in that land whither he is gone to prepare a place for them, and where he appears as their forerun-

ner and advocate,—it is only when these consolatory truths are embraced by lively faith, that this tormenting dread of death vanishes. By faith he perceives how unreasonable his fears are, and hope takes the place of despondency in his mind. The Gospel furnishes the only remedy against this tormenting dread, by directing the trembling penitent to that Mediator, who partook of our flesh and blood, that “through death,” he might “deliver them who through the fear of death, were all their life-time subject to bondage.”—(Heb. ii. 14, 15.) The fear of the Lord does not include in itself this dread of death, for where God is rightly feared there is also hope in his forgiving mercy; and this hope is directly opposed in its nature to the tormenting fear of death. “The fear of the Lord tendeth to life,” to the ardent desire of life, to the humble expectation of life, as well as to the best preparation for it.

But where this dread proceeds from a consciousness of a withheld heart—of a partial surrender of the affections to God, the cure must be sought in repentance, in the renewing operation of the Holy Spirit, in renouncing the world and its vanities, the flesh and its lusts, and resisting the devil and his wiles.—Death was at first denounced as a punishment against sin, and the Gospel shows us how this punishment may be changed in its nature, and become a blessing instead of a curse.—But where the terms of the

Gospel offer are not complied with, the nature of death remains unchanged, and consequently is still an object of great terror and alarm, and justly so. The man who always regards death as the expiration of his hope, as the final close of enjoyment, as the prelude to endless misery, cannot fear God as a Father, but must tremble before him as an angry and inflexible Judge. The unrenewed heart, although it fears the consequences of sin, desires to have the nature and perfections of God changed, rather than itself. The Gospel cannot convey comfort to such a mind, while it continues so averse to the designs of the Gospel, because the grace of God does not declare impunity to those who live in sin, but offers pardon to those only who renounce sin. The sting of death is sin; and this sting cannot be extracted while that remains in vigour which gives it all its keenness and virulence. He who would be healed of the wounds of sin, must repair to the "tree of life" whose leaves are "for the healing of the nations;" (Rev. xxii. 2.) but this tree grows on heavenly, and therefore on holy ground; and "any thing that defileth," or "whatsoever worketh abomination," (Rev. xxi. 27.) quenches in the soul all desire of the fruit of this tree, and unnerves the arm that it cannot pluck, and eat, and live: only "they that do his commandments, have right to the tree of life." (Rev. xxii. 14.) The "vine of Sodom"

(Deut. xxxii. 32.) may present an appearance pleasing to the eye, and resembling the tree of life, but he that gathers of its fruit, shall find that its "grapes are grapes of gall," and that its "clusters are bitter." (Deut. xxxii. 32.) He who would overcome the fear of death, must look to him who has vanquished the great enemy, who has said to the king of terrors, "O Death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction." (Hos. xiii. 14.)

The defective character of our fear of God, is often seen in the small improvement which we make of religious instructions and devotional exercises. How often have we attended on public worship, or other means of grace, and found our hearts apparently deeply interested, and our minds much impressed with the importance of divine things, and we have carried with us from the holy service some savour of heavenly affections, some of that seed of the Word which promised to abide and bring forth fruit; but we have afterwards fallen before the first temptation. The first snare of Satan, or lust of our own hearts, hath drawn us away from God, and we have exchanged the hope of an interest in his love for some lying vanity, for some empty pleasure, for a nothing! If we feared *always*, if this principle directed our walk and conversation continually, we should not only be devoted to God while actively engaged in his service, but should ever live

conformably to an intire surrender of ourselves to Him,—we should not only believe in God, but should hope that he is our God, and should enjoy the comfort of such an expectation; spiritual life would be vigorous in us, and our souls would prosper and be in health.

God grant that his fear, which is said to be “the beginning of wisdom,” (Ps. cxi. 10.) may illuminate our minds and understandings, be both the teacher and the lesson to us, and make us wise unto salvation! May that “fear of the Lord,” which is “clean,” (Ps. xix. 9.) purify our hearts from evil thoughts, and preserve our life from ill-conduct, that we may share in all the exceedingly great and precious promises which God has made to them that “fear before him;” that it may “be well” with us; that God may teach us in the way that we should choose, and we may have “strong confidence” in life, and find at the hour of death “a place of refuge!” (Prov. xiv. 26.) Amen.

DIVINE AGENCY.

A UNIVERSE in which beauty and order and design are every-where apparent, in which every animal is exactly adapted to the element where it finds its abode, its defence, and its maintenance,—a universe so constituted, and at the same time the production of mere lawless chance, and under the rule of blind fate, involves a contradiction too gross, one would imagine, to be for a moment received by any rank of intelligence. Such a notion has, perhaps, never been entertained by the darkest minds of heathenism : although uninformed by supernatural communications, of the origin of all things, of the nature and design of the operations of the Great Creator, yet they have remained in the grossness of their ignorance, without adding to it the violence which the impious absurdity of the doctrines of blind fate and undirected chance, must ever offer to the faculty of reason. Some wise men of this world, however, some who have pretended to more than ordinary distinction as intelligent beings, have in the presumptuous daring of their proud philosophy, concerted schemes and systems which were designed to account for the existence, and

order, and condition of all things, without the intervention or superintendence of a Great First Cause. In endeavouring to exalt their reason above the sphere appointed for it by God, they have pushed it beyond its due range of action, and thus exposed its feebleness and imbecility.

The perverseness and pride attendant on the depraved state of man, are, perhaps, in nothing more visible than in his wholly overlooking, and even, in some instances, denying the providential administration of God. The smallest reflection on his present condition, would show a man that he is placed in a system, where universal dependence is the rule or law, by which the whole visible order of beings subsists. There is no created being whatever in a state of insulated independence; external resources, of some kind or other, are the basis of the support of all animated existence: from the mean, and apparently unprofitable reptile, which makes its lonesome way in the earth, below the light of the cheering orb of day, to man the Lord of the creation, we are presented with an unbroken chain of mutual dependence. And if we observe the numerous striking and wonderful changes of circumstances, produced in the condition of man, by the unexpected turns, which this dependence, in its endless ramifications and contingencies, produces, we must come to the conclusion that all these apparent chances, are under the cognizance and actual superintend-

ence of a GREAT FIRST CAUSE, to whom nothing is contingent, nothing is accidental. All our measure of happiness or of misery on earth, depends, not absolutely, but under the will and hand of God, on the aspect which external events, produced by persons or things, bear to us as members of one common family and parts of one organised system of subordination. Our relation, in either of these respects, is subject to continual change, and every alteration may bring in its train consequences of the utmost importance to us, affecting our peace, our health, our every enjoyment. This is undeniably the condition in which every man finds himself: no one is disposed to controvert the fact, that any given moment may introduce such a change in his mental or bodily faculties and powers, or in his outward estate, or in his relative capacity—as sustaining some of the dearest and most intimate relations in life, as to increase his happiness, and add to his enjoyments, or to destroy his expectations, to baffle all his plans, and to blight every source of gratification. It is the persuasion of being in such a condition, that leads all men to propose various plans and methods, to guide themselves in their intercourse with society, and to devise probable means of success in their undertakings. This belief is the very spring of all the activity visible among men, so valuable and useful, when devoted to good and laudable objects and aims.

The divine superintendence in all the events of life, does not in any way tend to annul our moral accountableness. Man is placed in such a relation towards his Maker, that the will of God is to be taken for his constant rule of action ; good and evil are plainly defined for his guidance, both by the force and light of natural conscience, and to many, by the superadded light of the revelation of the Holy Scriptures. In consequence, man becomes an accountable being ; and that this responsibility may not be weakened, he is also a free agent, acting in every case of good or evil conduct, voluntarily, and after the choice of his own mind. The consent of the will must be necessary to render an action either good or bad ; this principle is admitted in all human legislature ; only idiots and madmen are held incapable of committing criminal actions meriting punishment, because they act from impulses, not under the guidance of reason, or of their right wills.

With respect to the providential administration of the world, we universally find that men act without a constant and direct reference to this administration ; and although they believe that the divine foreknowledge of all events whatever, from the beginning of time to the consummation of all things, necessarily ensures the occurrence of these events, yet they act (as free agents ever must) as if they were placed where contingency was the rule of their being, and that events might

or might not be affected by personal exertion and endeavour. And this is right and proper ; for although we acknowledge the hand of God in all events, and have constant faith in his providential administration of the world, yet we cannot penetrate his counsels, or discern his hand as it moves over the earth, and gives direction to every event. To God there can be nothing contingent ; to us every thing is dependent ; and the series of events in which we are destined to occupy during our continuance on the earth is to be preserved unbroken, as appointed by God, by our due and proper exertions and endeavours. The foreknowledge of God has not effect on the human will, to make it merely the passive recipient of external impressions, and to cause it to act with the mere name of a will, without the essential properties of volition.—God, our Creator, not only foresaw from all eternity the whole order and succession of events, but also all the remote causes and dependencies of such events, as proceeding from the operation and constitution of men and things which he purposed to create. Therefore, the foreknowing of these events, though it secured their certain occurrence, left the agents, so far as they were rational, free, and consequently individually accountable to Him for all their conduct. Surely there is nothing difficult in conceiving of a divine government, foreknown in all its bearings and occurrences,

and an order of beings under that government, subservient to all its purposes and designs, and yet acting from a consciousness of moral freedom and voluntary operation. Let not, then, any one seek to shelter himself from his responsibility to his Creator, under the notion that all his conduct was foreknown, and therefore foreordained by God, and that he is only a passive object moving in the scheme of things, as he is controlled by a superior and irresistible decree. The feelings of which he is conscious in every deliberate action, and the calculations which he makes on the comparative probability of some events, and on the possibility of others, and his constantly acting under the influence of these calculations, give a positive and unanswerable contradiction to his pretence of holding himself free from all responsibility, under the notion of resistless fate and necessity.

“A man’s heart,” then, “deviseth his way; but the Lord directeth his steps.” (Prov. xvi. 9.) Man is conscious of moral freedom in what he purposes to execute—in what he “deviseth,” and yet nothing can be brought to pass that is contrary to the plan of divine Providence. God permits the evil which he foresaw, and brings to pass the good which he designed. Man purposes and performs as an accountable agent, and the divine government is not thereby at all infringed on; God directeth the steps of man agreeably to

the counsels of his own will, and the freewill of man is not thereby impaired.

The government and superintendence of God extend to the minutest concerns and events; for we cannot suppose a perfect plan of Providence, without embracing the order and certain occurrence of every event in that plan; nor can we form any idea of a divinely connected series of events, that must not also be secure from accident and free from contingency. If the mighty whole be an object worthy of the divine regard, the parts of which it is constituted cannot be too mean for divine notice; if the grand result be according to divine appointment, the means by which it is produced, must be under the divine direction. A firm and enlightened belief in the doctrine of a particular Providence, will tend to produce in the human mind the peace which passeth all understanding, and an habitual resignation to the will of God.

1. It will produce peace in the mind. We find in the Word of God that a belief in the Providence of God, and a continual reliance on his Fatherly care and protection, are immediately connected with peace. "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. *And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*" (Phil. iv. 6, 7.) If

we reflect on our dependent condition and our frail mortality, irrespective of the divine superintendence, we may naturally be filled with much anxious care, and many desponding fears; for our very existence depends on a due supply of food and clothing, and our comfort rests in a great measure on the continuance of many things, which early and long habits have made essential to our convenience and enjoyments; and all these sources are exposed to so many vicissitudes, and are liable to be affected by so many causes, over which we have no control, that unless we have a higher resource than our own active endeavours and watchful prudence, and a more sure basis for reliance than our own forethought and diligence, we cannot exclude corroding care and anxious apprehension. How full of consolation, then, is the assured belief, that in dangers which we can neither foresee nor prevent, an ever-watchful and almighty Providence is at hand to be our defence, and to compass us about with his favour “as with a shield;”—(Ps. v. 12.)—that in weakness which is unable to resist calamity, the divine strength is prepared for us, and will be graciously and wisely imparted, according to our wants and necessities;—that in the hour of sorrow, when our spirits unsupported would sink into hopelessness and despair, the consolatory influence of the divine Spirit is ready to raise our fainting minds, and cheer our drooping spirits,

and to pour the balm of effectual and abiding comfort into our wounded hearts! How cheering and animating is the lively confidence of faith, that in a season of want, when our most strenuous efforts would be unavailing, the divine bounty, unwearied and inexhaustible, is at hand to confer seasonable and necessary supplies;—that in the time of distracting perplexity, arising from a dubious state of events, or from the dread of impending troubles, the divine control and guidance are in constant exercise to mark out the boundary of every event, and to point out the exact time of its occurrence, and of its duration, and to limit and restrain its effects;—that in affliction of body, which at once cuts off all supplies arising from our own exertions, and renders us dependent on the kindness and care of others, the divine hand which sent the affliction, is near to uphold us with its might, and open to communicate a needful supply for our every want;—that He, at whose disposal are both sickness and health, can either render the trial and suffering subservient to our spiritual welfare, and the health of our souls, or rebuke the disorder, and impart to us renovated strength, and the enjoyment of renewed health and vigour;—that in the hour of mortality, when flesh and heart are about to fail us, God will be the strength of our heart, and our portion for ever;—(Ps. lxxiii. 26.) that He will cheer with his enlivening grace our departing spirit, and

when the scenes and pleasures of this mortal life are ending, and closing upon our eyes for ever, he will show us by the spiritual vision of faith, the glorious and boundless prospects of an eternal world of glory;—that he who has “the keys of hell, (of the invisible world,) and of death,” (Rev. i. 18.) will watch over our crumbling and decaying bodies,—will receive our departed spirits,—will, in the day of God, raise us again from the dust, and dishonour, and corruption of the grave, and give us spiritual and glorious bodies,—exalt us to the honour of the sons of God,—bestow upon us unspeakable happiness and felicity, and establish us for ever and ever in the secure possession and full enjoyment of bliss unspeakable, and glory unfading and eternal!

2. This belief in the divine government of all things, will inspire us with habitual resignation to the will of God.

The true spirit of resignation is very different from that hardihood of spirit, and that insensible indifference, which result from a notion that all events are under the unalterable decree of a blind fate. A notion of this kind may lead men to regard all occurrences, whether joyous or grievous, with a stoical apathy of spirit, with a sort of obstinate resolution not to bend under calamity, nor to be much elated by prosperity; but all this is violence done to the heart; it is contrary to our natural feelings; it tends to keep

down, if not to quench, some of the best and finest sensibilities of our nature ; and after all, it neither raises a man above his troubles, nor well supports him under them ; but, in fact, gives him up to one of their most bitter consequences. For the natural tendency of suffering is to lead us to look beyond ourselves for assistance, from an experience which shows us that no man is independent, and that in most cases of suffering, the individual on whom calamity has fallen is unable to extricate himself, without the aiding hand of another, and to endure his sorrow without the kind sympathy, which induces others to join in bearing his burden. The unyielding spirit of the man of pretended indifference, affects to find in itself a sufficiency of resolution to meet any difficulty, and of fortitude to bear up under the pressure of any misfortune ; but in truth, there is a secret murmuring and fretting within him, which is subversive of all his boasted independence and individual mental resources, and which wounds his heart the more, because it is joined with that hopelessness of being able to overcome his difficulties, which is the natural consequence of his unhappy belief in insensate fate. Such a faith is, in fact, nothing more than a belief in a fixed law without a governor,—control without wisdom,—supreme power without feeling,—resistless force without pity or kindness,—a scheme of events without regard to consequences, or provision for con-

tingencies. Such is the miserable creed of the fatalist.

How different is all this from the spirit of true and calm resignation, which fills the breast of the Christian! In every circumstance and condition he has a steady regard to the will of a wise, and just, and merciful God, whose superintendence controls all occurrences, and directs all events. He bears continually in mind, that although the divine power secures the accomplishment of every thing, as foreseen by the divine prescience, yet that in the original scheme of divine government, there was a gracious provision made for the condition of man; and that in the execution of this government, there is ever a wise and kind regard to everything which can directly or relatively affect the welfare of man. When he considers that man is the chief work of God,—that all things in this lower world were created with a reference to the convenience and comfort of mankind,—that the whole plan of redemption, as made known in the Gospel, has relation only to the benefit of man, and that every thing is under the control of that Being, who can make all things subservient to his own will and purpose, and who will regulate and direct them so as to promote and fulfil all his purposes of grace to the sons of men;—when the christian reflects on all these things, and receives them as undoubted truths, he must not only be quiet and resigned under every part of his

dispensation, but also prepared to meet in a proper spirit every event that may befall him. He feels himself strong in the omnipotence of God ; instructed in the divine wisdom ; safe in the divine power and protection ; rich in the divine munificence and bounty ; secure in the divine faithfulness and truth ; because all these perfections are engaged to bring to pass the divine decrees, and all these decrees have a regard to the present well-being, and the future happiness of all whose dependence is on God, whose faith is centered in the Redeemer, and whose spiritual knowledge and strength are the result of the influence and teaching of the Holy Spirit.

The Christian is *at all times* resigned to the will of God, leaving *all* his concerns in the hands of a wise and merciful Father. He feels assured that nothing which relates to his condition or welfare, is beneath the divine notice ; because every event, however small, or comparatively insignificant, is indissolubly connected with the procedure of the whole plan of Providence, and has some influence on the result of that plan, and therefore cannot, as part of the whole, be unworthy of the notice which directs the whole, and which was pleased to make it one necessary constituent part in the arrangement of the intire scheme. Those who deny the divine superintendence of our mean affairs, degrade our condition below its real state ; and yet the same persons are in the habit

of exalting our reason, as the guide of our affairs, above its proper sphere. They take from God, what he has been pleased to retain as part of his divine prerogative, and assign to man's wisdom and guidance, what is far above his proper direction, or efficient control. Their notion of magnifying the divine greatness, as being far above the regard of earthly affairs, does in fact rob God of his true glory; they impair by their error the divine wisdom, as if it had created a world, and placed an order of beings in such circumstances, as were too mean for superintendence; and, consequently, unworthy of the production of infinite wisdom, and goodness, and power.

They seem willing to admit that the hand of God is visible in great and miraculous events; but that in what is called the order of nature, all things were at first appointed to one common course, and are left to this course, without any further interference or control from the Great First Cause. But with respect to what is called the *order of nature*, we may fall into a great error by supposing that the general course of things which we discern in the world, is the prescribed order or law, so established as never to be departed from on any occasion. This would in fact exclude the possibility of what are termed miracles, or extraordinary deviations from the general course of nature. But so far from a

miracle being of its very nature incredible and inadmissible, we may reasonably suppose that the order of the universe from the beginning, was so ordained as to allow of miracles; and that these extraordinary appearances and events are parts of the divine purpose, their time and manner, and the occasion of them, being all equally ordained and settled, together with the usual, and therefore unobserved, course of ordinary events. Undoubtedly, and as we may infer from reason, and are instructed by Revelation, *all events*, whether of magnitude or of inferior consequence, whether relating to high or low, rich or poor, whether affecting our temporal welfare, or rising higher so as to have an influence on our future condition, are equally under the divine guidance, and fall under the continual control of his power, and the ordering of his wisdom.

As a firm belief in the divine providence, does not exclude diligent endeavours on the part of men, so also it is not incompatible with the exercise of constant prayer. Accordingly, the apostolic exhortation to lay aside all corroding and anxious cares respecting the supply of our wants, is connected with a command to persevere in prayer, and in “*every thing*, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving,” to let our requests be made known unto God.” (Phil. iv. 6.) The assurance that all things are ordered immutably according to the divine counsel, does not set aside, or in

any way weaken the obligation to attend to so apparent, so reasonable, as well as Scriptural a duty as prayer ; because it has pleased God to appoint the means as well as the end, to prescribe to us the way in which blessings are to be obtained, as well as promise to bestow those blessings upon us. God has promised to answer prayer ; and this he does—not in the way of altering the course of events which he had foreknown, but by accomplishing those things, whether relating to the preservation, subsistence, or prosperity of man, which were connected in the divine plan of government with the prayer and the necessity of the individual. The one was at first designed to be subservient to the other ; and therefore prayer, and an expectation of answer to prayer, are reasonably united in our minds, together with an unshaken faith in the divine prescience and superintending power. Neither the will, nor the plan of God is changed, by receiving the prayer of man, because God grants only according to his own will and wisdom.—“ A man’s heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps.” Man prays according to the desires of his heart, and the judgment which he is able to form of his necessities ; but God sends those things only which are consistent with his government of the world, and truly conducive to the welfare of man.

The assurance that such is the way in which

God hears prayer, tends to produce in the mind of the Christian, both peace and resignation; *peace*, when he reflects that all events are at the divine disposal, and that God careth for his creatures; *resignation*, when he considers that the divine wisdom, and power, and goodness, and faithfulness are all engaged to bestow every thing that is needful for him. The permission to cast all our care on God, (1 Pet. v. 7.) is exactly and wisely adapted to our frail and dependent condition, and greatly exalts and magnifies the divine goodness and abounding mercy; man is benefited by it, and God is glorified.

The Christian, then, may ever put his trust in the Lord; he may avail himself of the high privilege, of spreading all his wants before the throne of grace in prayer, and of relying on the infinite wisdom, fatherly care, and boundless grace and compassion of his God; using all christian diligence in his vocation, because the power of God is without limit, and all events are at his disposal; and resting in peace and quiet resignation in his will, because the mercy of God endureth for ever, and his hand "directeth" our "steps."

HUMILITY.

AN acknowledgment that we are sinners, and subject to mortality, is readily made by all; we do not find any disposed to controvert so obvious a truth as the latter, nor any so unacquainted with their own feelings and infirmities, as to deny the former. Death having reigned universally, has compelled all men to expect one day to fall beneath its fatal shafts, how negligent soever they may be in making wise and due preparation for so solemn an event. And the customs of the most antient nations prove a general knowledge of sin and a conviction of guilt; inasmuch as sacrifices, which have been a religious rite in all ages and among all nations, show, by the taking away of the life of the victim, that they are performed more in the nature of an atonement, than an act of thanksgiving.—But though a conviction of guilt and an acknowledgment of mortality be so general, yet we find comparatively few persons, whose temper and disposition of mind correspond with their spiritual condition, or whose conduct is in accordance with their professed religious belief. There is a tendency in the human mind towards earthly, rather than heavenly objects;

men are prone to neglect their spiritual concerns, and to pay an undue regard to temporal affairs. The heart feels a dislike for those pursuits and those inquiries which relate to eternity, and perversely clings to the perishing scenes of the present life. All acknowledge themselves mortal, but how few live as those who would be prepared for the hour of death ! All confess themselves to be sinners, but few seek diligently and in earnest to know and embrace the means of escaping the punishment due to sin. All profess to expect a future and immortal life, but few make any provision beyond the present transitory state. The view of man being bounded by the visible heavens and earth, he limits his cares and attention to terrestrial things, and habitually neglects, and often intirely forgets his destinies in the world which is to come. Every thinking man is conscious of the prevalence of this worldly-mindedness in his own bosom ; and a careful observation of the objects which engross the busy attention and anxious care of the major part of mankind, will show that this depraved attachment to the world is general, is universal.

But we must not stop at the establishment of the fact ; it behoves us to endeavour to ascertain the cause, and to search for the origin of the evil. It requires no argument to prove that the soul is infinitely more valuable than the body, that the interests of eternity surpass beyond com-

parison those of time, and that the best and most extensive possessions in this world, are outweighed in an unspeakable degree, by the "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," (2 Cor. iv. 17.) which remains for the people of God in the kingdom of heaven. The lowest degree of spiritual knowledge, constrains men to give their assent to these truths. But the evil of neglect, indifference, and aversion for the practice which the acknowledgment of these truths ought ever to produce, remains in undiminished operation. It cannot proceed from any natural disregard, which men have for their safety and comfort; the principle of self-love would lead them to be diligent in securing every thing which would promote their enjoyment. It cannot proceed from any defect in the original constitution of their nature; for "God created man in his own image," and "blessed them," and pronounced concerning "every thing that he had made," that "it was very good." (Gen. i. 27—31.) The moral condition of mankind, is a state of degradation from an originally perfect condition. The purity and innocence of our first parents, constituted their perfection; and as it is of the very nature of innocence, to be intirely free from moral stain, the contraction of guilt must necessarily destroy this innocence, and with it the perfection which it constituted; and consequently introduce a tendency to evil, and a corresponding

dislike of what is good and holy. A mind originally formed without any taint of evil, when once it has yielded to temptation, becomes from that time indisposed to mental purity, and strongly biassed towards what is evil. The original state of man, was one of intire resemblance to the Creator, in righteousness and holiness, that is, such a moral resemblance as a finite creature can bear to a Being of infinite perfections; it was not at all deteriorated by any innate tendency to sin; it was not at all blended with any love for the forbidden fruit. The freedom of man's primitive state, required that he should be capable of choosing between retaining the present good which he enjoyed, and venturing on the future evil which was unknown. He might be tempted to evil, but was not placed under a necessity of yielding to temptation. A tendency to evil might be produced in his mind, by sacrificing his moral rectitude—his spotless innocency; a love for what was forbidden, might be blended in his heart with the delight which he felt in walking in holy obedience; but it was at the risk of that evil principle predominating, when once admitted. We are not to suppose that the knowledge of Adam in his state of purity, was confined to the consequences of guilt as merely incurring the divine displeasure, and the fearful sentence of death which was denounced against

transgression. The moral debasement which sin has brought on the mind, is too great an evil to have been concealed from Adam, as one of the consequences of disobedience. The will of God was doubtless fully known to our first parent, by immediate communication, so far as it related to his condition of innocence, and the wilful abandonment of that condition, and the dreadful consequences which would ensue to himself and to all his posterity. When Adam put forth his hand to "exalt" himself, in obedience to the pride which a sinful acquiescence in evil suggestions had generated in his mind, he deliberately and wilfully sunk from the high rank in which he was placed by creation, and which he maintained by rectitude, to the low degradation in which we now find all his descendants plunged. He lost not only his innocence, but his preference for good; he not only contracted guilt, but acquired also a disposition to evil. Then the moral beauty of the soul—conformity to the will of God, was converted into the deformity of vice; then purity—man's chief delight in the state of innocence, was laid aside for the pollution of sin; then the "perfect freedom" of God's service, was exchanged for the hard slavery of Satan; then all the honourable, and pure, and peaceful affections of the heart, were supplanted by the baneful and tormenting passions, the offspring of darkness

and of hell ; then love, and joy, and peace, and meekness, and humility, and justice, yielded to envy, and hatred, and malice, and anger, and strife, and pride, and fraud, and rapacity, and every evil work ; and then Eden, the garden of the Lord, was blasted by the envy of Satan and the crimes of man, and the earth converted into a comparative wilderness.

A man may make a general acknowledgment of sin, without feeling, or even being willing to allow, all the evils which sin has introduced into the world, so far as relates to the moral degradation of mankind ; and consequently without any right understanding of the provision, which God has made for their recovery in the Gospel. There is a spurious religion, which does not enumerate humility in the catalogue of its virtues. That there is a God, that we are dependent on him for all things, that we are sinners, but that God is merciful, form the main articles of its creed. The duties which result from our relation to God, the dispositions which should predominate in our minds as sinners, the assurance that God is just, as well as merciful, and that our moral condition is such as to require the influence of the Holy Spirit to deliver us from our natural blindness and obduracy and corruption, and the arm of God to raise up for us a Saviour, who should be unto us both “ wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption ;” (1 Cor. i. 30.)

these are points which enter not into such a religious system ; and therefore, instead of inculcating humility, because of the universal corruption of mankind, we often hear of encouragement to pride by dissertations on the dignity of human nature.

Pride was the first ruin of man. It was from the beginning directly opposed to the right feeling, which a sense of his real condition would have inspired. It was not made for man. The condition of man was ever one which called for humility ; not only as most becoming his state of dependence on God for existence, and for all the means of preserving that existence, and rendering it happy, but also as the best and surest safe-guard in that state. While Adam continued in humility, —while he “ spake trembling,” he was safe, he exalted himself in the favour and protection of God ; but when he aspired to raise himself above the state in which God had placed him, and to reach, as he thought, a kind of equality with his Maker, he sunk below his original dignity, and found only degradation and ruin, where he had expected glory and honour.

True humility is, then, a striking characteristic of the true Christian. It can proceed only from a thorough acquaintance with our real condition as sinners, from a consciousness of the universal corruption of our nature ; it is grounded on a deep and lively sense of our intire dependence on God,

of our guilt and desert, and of our infinite obligation to divine goodness and grace.

To produce true humility in the heart, and to maintain it in lively exercise, a man must be acquainted with his real condition upon the earth. He must know the degradation of his nature from its original state by creation ; he must have a knowledge of God, of his justice, his purity, and the immutability of his Word ; he must have a clear understanding of the desert of sin, of his intire dependence on God, and of the destinies which await him in another world, and which are so essentially connected with his conduct in the present life. While men are ignorant of these things, or while they live in forgetfulness of them, they are prone to indulge in proud feelings, so incompatible with their condition, and so inimical to their true interests. Without the salutary checks to pride, which the foregoing knowledge is calculated to produce, men are apt to live in a great degree in an imagined independence of God. So far from acknowledging him in all their ways, as their Creator, and Preserver, and Judge, they form their plans, and engage in the active prosecution of those endeavours which are most likely to accomplish their designs, without any reference to the guidance and blessing of God, without any profitable and influential conviction that unless agreeable to the divine will, and directed by divine guidance, and prospered by

the divine blessing, their wisest schemes will be frustrated, and their most laborious efforts unavailing.

Repeated disappointments, and the breaking up of the best concerted purposes, may lead men to some reflection on the uncertainty of earthly things, and on the limited powers of earthly wisdom, but they are not sufficient of themselves to excite deep humility in the mind ; they sometimes lead men to indifference, or even to despair ; and at best can only rouse them to renewed and more vigorous exertions in the same pursuits, and with the same motive and design. The conviction of the impotence of mortal man, which should have led to a feeling of the necessity of divine help, and to an earnest desire of obtaining that help, and to a diligent seeking of it in a right way, is too soon obliterated by the prevalence of earthly cares ; and the impression made on the mind, so far as it was salutary, is gradually effaced by the collision of worldly occupations and engagements, and the mere fact of the past recurrence of unpleasant reverses, is preserved in the memory, without benefiting the heart, without exalting the soul to the pursuit of heavenly objects. The spirit may be *broken* by trouble, but not *humbled*. The sorrows and trials which proceed from man's degeneracy, have a natural tendency only to sour the disposition, to quench the best affections of the heart, and to increase a

worldly-minded spirit ; but when they are accompanied by humility, proceeding from a consciousness of guilt, and a willing acknowledgment that where the just demerit of sin would have involved us in temporal and eternal ruin, there the abounding mercy and grace of God have dispensed blessings instead of inflicting punishment, then the nature of trouble is changed, and that which of itself would have hardened the heart, and perverted the powers of the mind, and diverted the active exertions to a wrong end, now tends to soften and ameliorate every untoward passion, to sanctify every unhallowed desire, and to prompt every energy to a noble object.

A consciousness of the infirmities and wants of our nature, so favourable to the nurture of an humble spirit, is the first step towards a deliverance from the ill consequences of our weakness and necessity. While men rely on an imaginary fund of strength in themselves, and suppose that their own resources can furnish all necessary aid, according to the exigencies of every untoward occurrence, they are indisposed to make a proper application to the great Fountain of Strength. They may, indeed, express in a formal manner, their inability to overcome difficulties, to avoid dangers, or to ensure success, without the divine aid and blessing, and they may join in the general acknowledgment of these truths, and in the supplications which are founded on them in the

services of the Church ; but they do not feel their individual feebleness, nor see how totally they are despoiled of original strength and power, so as to render them intirely dependent on the help and blessing of God. They are offended at the enforcement of those humiliating doctrines of Scripture, which state the destitution of spiritual strength and ability, as making part of that moral degradation to which the Fall has reduced all mankind, and consequently they cannot avail themselves of those means of obtaining heavenly assistance, which the same Scriptures make known to us.

The humble confession of the prophet, teaches us that " it is not in man that walketh, to direct his steps ;" (Jerem. x. 23.) but how can he who does not feel that he lacks wisdom, ask it of God, " that giveth to all men liberally?" (Jam. i. 5.) The sense of our infirmities must precede the application by faith to the throne of grace, for divine aid and succour. He that knows not his weakness and deficiencies, " knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know," (1 Cor. viii. 2.) either with respect to a just estimate of himself, or a proper understanding of the true and only source of effective help and direction. The declaration, that, " we are not sufficient of ourselves, to think any thing as of ourselves," (2 Cor. iii. 5.) is unavailing as a direction to the only and ever-benign Giver of needful strength, to that man who has

no lively sense that “our sufficiency is of God,” (2 Cor. 3. 5.) and that “it is God that worketh in us, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure.” (Phil. ii. 13.) The depravity of man, as well as his deficiency of good-will to make a right application of his understanding to spiritual things, must be known and acknowledged, before he will join in sincerity with the penitent Psalmist, and say, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.” (Ps. li. 10.)

When men rightly perceive the nature and extent of their infirmities and wants, they humbly acknowledge them before God, and earnestly seek for divine assistance. Thus humility is found to be favourable to faith, and a friend to prayer. It leads us to renounce all dependence on ourselves, and to look for help from God. It disposes us to pray for the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and to acknowledge that he is the author as well as the maintainer of spiritual life in us,—that to him we must be indebted for inclining our perverse will to choose good rather than evil; for enlightening our beclouded understanding, and imparting to us the true knowledge of God; for diverting our corrupt affections from a misplaced attachment to earthly vanities, and sanctifying them, and disposing them to a just exercise on proper objects; for exalting our grovelling desires, and raising them to their proper pursuit—the attainment of heavenly possessions. The glory which

humility thus ascribes to God, as the Giver of "every good and every perfect gift," does in some sort redound to the exaltation of man; for what greater honour can a mortal receive, than to be clothed and adorned with graces of heavenly origin, and to have all his necessities supplied from the Fountain of eternal Goodness.

When we are called by the Providence of God to endure affliction, a humble spirit, by inclining us to "hear the rod, and who hath appointed it," (Mic. vi. 9.) removes half the grievousness of the trial. A proud spirit induces us to lift our heads against the Providence of God, and to endeavour to shake the yoke from our necks, and thus we are the more galled by its weight, and it proves a mill-stone unto us to sink us yet deeper in calamity. But humility teaches us to bear up with a patient spirit under the load, and thus half its pressure is removed; as by the skilful poising of a burden, a great part of its weight is unfelt. Humility cheers the heart under the faintness of "hope deferred;" it blunts the edge of disappointment; sweetens the bitter cup of sorrow; unfolds bright prospects to blighted expectations, and obtains the succour of almighty aid, where human strength and exertion would be fruitless and unavailing.

The Scriptures are given us to be our guide and our solace throughout the journey of life; but the humiliating statements which they con-

tain of the degeneracy of mankind, and the straitness of the path which they mark out as leading to life, are very offensive to human pride; and thus the direction becomes useless, and the comfort is rejected. Humility is the only true preparation of the heart for reading the Holy Scriptures. The Bible contains so much that tends to fill man with shame and confusion, rather than with high notions of himself;—its doctrines also are so contrary to the pride of reason, and to the wisdom of this world,—so opposed to the “understanding of the prudent,” (1 Cor. i. 19.) that unless the heart of the reader be embued with true humility, he will be in danger, with the world, of contemning the “base things and despised,” which “God hath chosen,” (1 Cor. i. 28.) and of making that a “stumbling-block,” which was designed for a help and a guide; and of converting into a “rock of offence,” that which was ordained for a “sanctuary,” (Isa. viii. 14.) and a sure place of refuge and defence. The declarations of the Bible, which give offence to the carnal mind, teach the humble man to search more deeply into his own heart, to weigh his spirit, to examine his motives, and to scrutinize all his actions. The Bible is given to the humble, to the penitent, to the lowly, and to sinners—to sinners who, far from disclaiming and cloaking their guilt, confess it with sincere abhorrence, and with a desire of obedience.

The declarations made in the Scriptures, are in fact addressed to all, and intended for all ; but they may be said in a particular manner to be given to the humble and lowly ; because to such they are acceptable ; they find in them all that is necessary to their condition. The promises of God are addressed only to those, who possess the dispositions of mind named in each promise ; and humility, as the foundation of every christian grace, is studiously to be sought as the best title to the promises, and the best qualification for the enjoyment of them. The promises of pardon to the penitent, can only be embraced by the humble ; because there can be no true repentance without humility,—without an humble acknowledgment of guilt, and a deep sense of the nature and demerit of sin. The gracious assurance of Christ, that he came “ to seek and to save that which was lost,” (Luke xix. 10.) can convey comfort and hope only to the humble mind ; because where the pride of reason hardens men in the denial of the lost and ruined state of mankind, on account of original sin and the corruption and depravity of the whole human race, and puffs them up with high and vain notions of the dignity of human nature, they will reject the terms of salvation , and will not stand on the same ground as those who are addressed in the Gospel as labouring, and being “ heavy laden,”—as sitting in mental “ darkness,” and under the

“power of Satan,”—(Acts xxvi. 18.) as “dead in trespasses and sins.” (Eph. ii. 1.) To open the Bible with an unhumbled spirit, is to read with a blinded mind—with a veil upon the heart, (2 Cor. iii. 4—15.) and to such persons the Bible is as a sealed book; the true meaning of its contents is hidden from them: that which should carry conviction to their minds, only confirms their prejudices; that which should make them shed the tear of penitence, gives offence to their proud spirit. But when humility gives a new character to the heart, the understanding becomes enlightened, and the “spirit of wisdom and revelation” (Eph. i. 17, 18.) is imparted, and men cease to walk “according to the flesh;” then the weapons employed in the spiritual warfare are no longer carnal, “but mighty through God, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” (2 Cor. x. 2—5.)

The advantages of an humble spirit, extend to both temporal and spiritual concerns. Humility is the surest defence in life, and the best preparation for death. It will save us from many sorrows and troubles in this world, and qualify us for the enjoyment of all the blessings and happiness of the world which is to come. A proud spirit adds weight to unavoidable calamity; and, by unduly exalting itself, becomes exposed to

many afflictions, which might have been avoided by a contrary disposition of mind. In a world of men actuated by the same principles of self-love and self-preservation, there must be many conflicting interests, and he who has not learnt to yield, and on many occasions to withdraw his claims, and to suffer partial loss and inconvenience, will be constantly liable to the vexation of being compelled to submit to the more powerful influence of opponents, and to be continually irritated at the frustration of his plans by the unintentional opposition of some, and by the designed resistance of others. There will be no day in which pride will not either undergo a mortification, or find an imaginary source of repining and discontent. But all these real and fancied evils, all this created trouble or unavoidable calamity, an humble mind either escapes, or bears so as to diminish the weight of the suffering. The evils from which it cannot flee, it alleviates by patience; and effaces by a yielding temper and a conciliatory disposition, many troubles from the catalogue of human misery. From how many hours of fretfulness, of wounded and harassed feelings, of hatred and enmity, of anxious and painful solicitude, of heart-consuming care, does humility exempt a man! It is a grace to be earnestly desired, not only for the positive blessings which it brings with it, and for the loveliness of its intire character, but also for the ex-

emption from very many troubles and vexations which it confers.

Its chief excellency, however, consists in the high character which it bears in the sight of God, and in the many and great blessings which are annexed to it in the Word of God.—The favour of God must be the desired object of rational creatures; and this favour is promised to certain dispositions of the heart, but to none more frequently or more fully, than to the grace of humility. Do we possess this humble spirit? We are then entitled to expect assistance when in difficulties, consolation in the time of suffering, deliverance in the hour of danger, strength against a time of temptation, and a blessing on all our undertakings. Do our trials press heavily on us, and urge us to cry mightily unto God in prayer? The Bible assures us that “he forgetteth not the cry of the humble.” (Ps. ix. 12.) Are we weighed down with sorrows? God descends to the “contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble.” (Isaiah lvii. 15.) Are we threatened by impending and alarming dangers? “He shall save the humble person.” (Job. xxii. 29.) Do temptations increase and assail us on every side, and place our faith and virtue in jeopardy? “He giveth more grace;” He “resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.” (Jam. iv. 6.) Do we feel our intire dependence on God, and therefore desire his aid and blessing in all our ways? “By

humility and the fear of the Lord, are riches, and honour, and life." (Prov. xxii. 4.) In fine; this grace of the Holy Spirit is one of the most striking evidences of our adoption into "the household of God," and of our title to all the privileges of the sons of God. It is the source of contentment not to be broken up even by the hand of adversity; of peace not to be ruffled by the untoward events of this life; and of intire submission to the will of God. It bears its own peculiar blessings with it in this life, and it has a rich inheritance reserved for it in the world which is to come.

THE CHRISTIAN TEMPER UNDER AFFLICTION.

THAT infinite goodness and mercy should ever accompany the infinite power and wisdom of the Deity, is quite agreeable to reason, and is the direct testimony of Scripture. What we know of God by the operations of his hands, in the various works of creation, bears its testimony to the existence and joint exercise of these perfections ; and the Word of God in all its declarations, corroborates this testimony, and establishes it in the fullest and most satisfactory manner. That every variety of inanimate objects in nature, should in their forms, and properties, and arrangement, combine to produce grandeur of appearance, and sublimity of effect, and in their harmony and fitness display all the beauty of the most skilful design and beneficent purpose,—and that happiness should reign throughout every order of animated being, rational and irrational, placed each in its own peculiar sphere of action, and calculated for different modes of enjoyment,—seems to be a conclusion perfectly compatible with right notions of the Supreme Being, and such as the right exercise of reason would lead us to entertain. It evidently

involves a striking contradiction, to suppose that a God of perfect wisdom, should create a system in which disorder should predominate,—that a God of infinite power, should be the author of a universe, in which there is the grand and capital defect of a want of harmony,—that a God of boundless goodness and love, should give existence to beings, who should be the prey of unhappiness, of suffering, of misery ! As the work of a God of wisdom, the creation must be perfect in its design ; as the production of a God of power, it must be complete in its execution ; and as the result of goodness and love, it must be happy in its nature and condition. These seem to be inferences unavoidable from the contemplation of the character of the Deity, either as known from the operation of his hands, or from the revelation which he has been pleased to give of himself. We cannot conceive of imperfection in the works of God, or of failure in his purposes. In the original constitution of the world which we inhabit, there must have been, as we have before stated, uninterrupted harmony, perfect order and agreement, exact adaptation of persons, places, and things, the most accordant union, and unmingled happiness and peace. The nature and perfections of God require this. An all-powerful Being, who is also infinitely wise and good, must ever act in perfect accordance with himself ; all the works of his hands must be the result of the

harmony and union of all his perfections ; and that such was the case at the origin of the present system of things, in which we are called to live and act, is fully established by the declaration of God himself in his holy Word.

Does the condition of the world accord with these conclusions ? Do we find ourselves placed in a state of things where peace, and harmony, and uninterrupted enjoyment prevail ? Do we behold a world of undisturbed order and of universal happiness ? Certainly not : the furthest from it possible. We see beauty, and a display of divine power and goodness in the earth and in the heavens ; but if we are exempt from sorrow ourselves, we can look in no direction without witnessing human suffering ; in short, “ the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together.” (Rom. viii. 22.) If we look into the world at large, we shall find great inequality in the condition of nations, whether we have regard to natural advantages, or the benefits resulting from mild and beneficent institutions of society and government. And if we look more minutely into the state of every country, we shall find a great diversity of condition among men. Some are in health, others in misery and affliction. Some are exposed to the keenest mental anguish, arising from their narrow and precarious means of subsistence. Some are actually perishing from hunger, and the want of the very necessa-

ries of life; whilst others are rolling in plenty, and rioting in luxury and extravagance. Some are hoarding up to no useful or rational purpose, that wealth which would gladden the hearts of thousands, and save many from utter destitution and ruin, if wisely dispersed abroad. Some live under the most valuable religious advantages, which they neglect or despise; while others are bowing down in the ignorance and blindness of benighted heathenism, before stocks and stones, the works of their own hands.—All this inequality does not result, as the infidel would affirm, from the unjust distribution of the things of this life by a blind chance, without any interference of a divine Providence. No: we must seek some other solution of the question. With an humble acknowledgment of all the divine perfections, we shall discover a far better and more rational method of removing the difficulty. We see that disorder has entered the creation; we feel that all are exposed to the dreadful consequences of this disorder; we know that none are exempt from death—the consummation of the curses inflicted on the human race.—These evils cannot have proceeded from the Creator, in the mere exercise of his power; they must have been introduced by incurring the heavy penalties, which he had denounced against the violation of some prescribed law and rule of conduct. By attending to the voice of inspiration, we find this to be

the case. All evil results from the disorder which sin originally brought into the world, and which the continuance of sin still maintains in the world. The want of happiness among men, does not arise from any defect in the divine goodness, but from depravity in the creature. Man was guilty before he knew what sorrow was; in his original condition he was not allied to suffering of any kind; it is of his fallen condition that the Scripture speaks when it affirms that "man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward." (Job. v. 7.) The truth and faithfulness of God secured the perfect happiness of man, so long as he continued in a state of innocence and obedience; and the same truth and faithfulness place him, on his disobedience, in an exposure to all the sufferings denounced against rebellion; for the threatenings of God must be put in execution, as well as his promises be accomplished. The same word which assured our first parents of the continuance of perfect, unmingled enjoyment, while they remained uncontaminated with sin, was also as secure a pledge that the loss of happiness, and the incurring of punishment, should inevitably attend the transgression of the divine law.

"Man is," then, "born unto trouble:" as naturally as the flame ascends—"as the sparks fly upward," so assured are his sorrows, so inevitable his sufferings. It will, therefore, be a wise

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and profitable inquiry, how afflictions may be borne, and how they may be improved.

Trouble of some kind or other, in greater or less degree, is the lot of every one; the proportion varies in the experience of different individuals, being regulated by that infinite wisdom, which best knows how to adapt every circumstance of a man's dispensation to his particular character. An abiding conviction that the measure of suffering is allotted and proportioned by the divine hand, will form the best aid to enable us to bear afflictions with a becoming spirit. If the burden be light, it calls for thankfulness with humility, for rejoicing with trembling; if the trial be heavy, we should not faint under it, but look up to God for assistance, who hath said, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." (Deut. xxxiii. 25.) All afflictions proceed from sin, and therefore must be regarded in the light of punishment—as marks in general of the divine displeasure; but although such be the origin of suffering to all, yet we are not to judge of the particular case of individuals, in regard to their acceptance with God, by the measure of suffering which may be assigned to them in this world. We have an assurance that "whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth;" and the end of this chastisement is "our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness." (Heb. xii. 6—10.)

The infliction of pain and distress of any kind, is not merely an act of divine power and sovereignty, but a part of the divine government; and is continued even under the dispensation of the gospel. "He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men;" (Lam. iii. 33.) therefore when "the Lord killeth, and maketh alive," when "he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up,"—(1 Sam. iii. 6.)—when he bends his bow, and causes the arrows of his quiver to enter into the reins,—when he fills the spirit with bitterness, and removes the soul far off from peace, (Lam. iii. 12.—17,) it is with the merciful design of bringing back the rebellious spirit of man to a right sense of his condition, his duties, and his prospects.

Every mind possesses those particular dispositions, propensities, and feelings, which constitute its individuality of character; and the diversity of this character requires for each a particular kind and degree of moral discipline. Some minds are so impressible, so timid, so yielding, that in their moral culture, but a small portion of restraint is necessary; they are humbled and subdued by a light affliction; a gentle reproof recalls them from error: while others are either so prone to fall into evils of the heart, of the speech, or of the life, or so unbending, so stubborn in their rebellion, so impenetrable, as to call for a sterner mode of tutelage, a heavier rod of calamity, a keener curb

of restraint. Some hearts are to be beneficially influenced only by the constant excitement of terror; others are to be bowed to submission only by the continual infliction of severe pain and suffering. The characters of some are so apparent, that the design of God in their chastisement, cannot well be misunderstood or misinterpreted; but that of very many others is so imperfectly known, either by themselves or others, that the allotments of heaven, in their case, are always mysterious and impenetrable. The absence of deep depravity, or of violent opposition to the commanded will of God, in some persons, may be produced by the very afflictions for which we are unable to account; and the disposition of the mind may be held in constant check and restraint, so as not to discover all the evil that really lurks in the heart, and which is known only by the All-seeing God. The perpetual thwarting and disappointment which some persons meet with in all their undertakings, may be the obstacle (merciful in its design, though afflictive in its nature,) which keeps them back from scenes, and situations, and relations, which would call forth the hidden evil of the heart, and expose them to suffering here, and to endless perdition hereafter. It is, therefore, of great importance to ascertain, as far as possible, our own true character. Much will ever remain unknown to us, because "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who

can know it;" (Jerem. xvii. 9.) and one of the evils of our degraded nature, is a blind self-love which flatters and deceives us, and cloaks and dissembles our failings, making us partial to our faults, and leading us even to miscale them by the name of virtues. But a diligent watchfulness over our spirits, and a careful, impartial, sincere examination of ourselves by the Word of God, will open to us so much of our real character in the sight of God, as will tend to detect some of that foolishness of man, which perverteth his way, and to check in us the propensity, natural to the human heart, to fret against the Lord. (Prov. xix. 3.)

Afflictions, when sanctified, become blessings; that is, when they are borne with a subdued spirit, with resignation,—when the hand of God is discerned in them, and acknowledged,—when they are received as the kind chastisements of a Heavenly Father, and when all murmuring and repining is suppressed by that faith, which holds fast its confidence, under every trial, in the faithfulness, and wisdom, and loving-kindness, and compassion of God,—when diligent inquiry is made in the heart, why we are afflicted,—when we say to the Lord, "Show me wherefore thou contendest with me," (Job. x. 2.) with a sincere desire to understand the dispensation, and to derive from it all the spiritual advantage which it is intended to produce in us, by leading us to self-

examination, to repentance, to watchfulness, to humility, to heavenly-mindedness, to prayer. These are the "fruits of righteousness," which are yielded by sanctified afflictions. (Heb. xii. 11.) When the gracious design of God has been answered, and the affliction removed, the mind is enlightened to perceive, and the heart chastened to the acknowledgment that "it is good that a man should both hope, and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord,"—that "it is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth." (Lam. iii. 26, 27.) Sanctified afflictions are like the angel's hand, which drew Lot out of Sodom; they withdraw us from the world; (God being merciful unto us;) and if we linger, the force of the visitation will be proportioned to the resistance which we make. If we carefully examine the state of our hearts, and the habitual tendency of our minds, previously to the chastening of the Lord, we shall find that we wilfully resisted the "still, small voice" of gentle reproof, which the mercy of God addressed to us once or twice; then we resisted the mild stroke of his rod, till at length we were brought to consider our ways, to hear the rod, and who had appointed it, (Mic. vii. 6.) and to cry to Him, "Remove thy stroke away from me; I am consumed by the blow of thine hand." (Ps. xxxix. 10.)

Afflictions tend to discover the firmness and stability of the foundation, on which the Chris-

tian rests his hopes. The world deserts a man in distress, it fails him when he leans on it for support; but the more severe the affliction which cometh from God, the greater grace does he manifest in upholding the soul, that it faint not because of tribulation. Where strength is needed, it is liberally bestowed; where consolation is required, it is plentifully supplied. The disciples in the storm had all an equal share in the love of Jesus, but to *sinking* Peter he stretched out his arm, and revived his dying faith.—When John was in the desert isle, he was ravished in spirit, and rapt in heavenly visions; and David experienced at no time sweeter communion with God, or more cheering times of refreshment, than when he was in the wilderness. Thus afflictions strengthen faith, and perfect patience. Thus they help us to glorify God, by casting all our care upon him, and by looking to him for succour and deliverance, when all earthly aid is useless, and all human efforts are unavailing.

Afflictions are also a means in the hand of God, of calling us back to him when we have backslidden. The world beguiles us of the simplicity which should distinguish us as Christians, and we become unstable in our ways; spiritual declension, by insensible, but gradual degrees, undermines the health of the soul, and impoverishes its prosperity; we leave our first love; we retain a name to live, but are spiritually dead;

we forget how we have received and heard, and the things which remain in us are ready to die; we conform to the world in some point which requires the previous weakening of christian principle, the previous sacrifice of christian integrity; and we say of the sinful departure of heart and conduct,—“Is it not a little one?” *Gen.* (^{*Gen.*}~~*Lev.*~~ xix. 20.) Why should we be righteous overmuch? Thus we grieve the Holy Spirit of God, and quench those inward checks which he causes us to feel from time to time: We sleep as on the crumbling edge of a precipice, till God in the faithfulness and steadfastness of his covenant of peace, puts forth the rod of his displeasure, and visits us with temporal afflictions, till we “know that the most High ruleth,” (*Dan.* iv. 25.) and return to him with the language of true repentance, “Behold we come unto thee; for thou art the Lord our God. We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covereth us; for we have sinned against the Lord our God, we and our fathers from our youth, even unto this day,”—(*Jerem.* iii. 22—25.)—“Therefore we will go and return unto our first husband; for then was it better with us than now.” (*Hos.* ii. 7.)

God “doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.” He sends not affliction unless he sees it to be necessary; and he removes it when it has accomplished in us his purpose of grace. Who among us can say that his strength

has not been proportioned to his day? Have we not even been disposed to choose our afflictions, and to love the will of God that sent them, and the hand of God that inflicted them? Has he not in sickness suppressed our murmurings and repinings at the health and vigour of others around us, by the reflection that the health of the soul far outweighs the life of the body,—that while natural strength shall decay and utterly perish, spiritual strength shall be renewed, and be vigorous for ever?—Has he not put a song of praise into our lips, and peaceful resignation into our hearts? Can we not say with the pious, the afflicted David, “I remembered thy judgments of old, O Lord, and have comforted myself?” (Psalm cxix. 52.) Let us then set up our “way-marks,” erect our “stones of help,” and record on them the mercies of divine grace; that by looking back on these memorials of past deliverances, we may be encouraged to “say of the Lord, He is my refuge, and my fortress, my God; in him will I trust.” (Psalm xci. 2.)

There is great diversity in the circumstances of christians, but they all agree in one point of resemblance,—they are all tried, they all suffer tribulation in some degree. Under the first covenant, temporal mercies were promised to the obedient; and so long as the Israelites were steadfast in their allegiance, and continued to serve God, they lacked no earthly enjoyment.

Under the new covenant, the promises to the church, among other things are tribulation and persecution to all who will live godly in Christ Jesus, together with grace to support their trials. When our Lord addressed a new disciple, it was as to one entering on a course of self-denial, on a state of discipline and trial ; “ Come take up the cross, and follow me ;” “ If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.” (Mark x. 21—Luke ix. 23.)

Another branch of the christian temper, in bearing and improving afflictions, is the consideration that we are thereby likened to Christ, who, in the assumption of our nature, became subject to all our sufferings. The apostle Paul urges us to rejoice, inasmuch as we are “ partakers of Christ’s sufferings ;” (1. Pet. iv. 13.) and he himself desired earnestly to know “ the fellowship of his sufferings,” (Phil. iii. 10.) and to “ fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ.” (Col. i. 24.) If he, who was without sin, was exposed to sorrow and trial for our sakes, shall we repine because a small portion of the bitter fruit of iniquity is assigned to us,—because a few drops of the cup of God’s anger against sin, are presented to us ! Shall not gratitude to Him, who stood a spectacle to men and angels, a patient substitute for a guilty world, to receive on his guiltless head the wrath of omnipotent justice, to endure in his soul

the unknown agony of a spirit forsaken by the Father of spirits, in order that our souls might again receive the impress of the divine image, and again be restored to happy communion with God ;—shall not these considerations awaken such gratitude in our hearts to the Redeemer, as shall suppress all repining and fretting against the hand of the Lord, and cause us, instead of fainting and being weary, to rejoice, and “ to count it all joy,” when we fall into afflictions and trials, because we then share in an especial manner in the sympathy of the Saviour ; and because “ it is a faithful saying”—“ if we suffer, we shall also reign with him,—if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him.” (2 Tim. ii. 11, 12,) Our conformity to Christ, if we are his faithful and true disciples, will embrace not only a fellowship of suffering, but of temper and of spirit under that suffering, and of the enjoyment of endless and perfect glory. As he was our representative when he became an offering for us, and the stroke of justice descended on him, so also he is our representative in heaven, whither all his followers shall go, and where also they shall be like him, for they shall see him as he is. (1 John iii. 2.)

And this expectation of heavenly felicity is another motive for the patient suffering of affliction, which has the sanction of the Word of God. “ I reckon,” saith St. Paul, “ that the sufferings of this present time, are not worthy to be com-

pared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." (Rom. viii. 18.) The assurance that the trials of this mortal life shall cease with the cessation of that life, and not be renewed and prolonged in the unknown state of existence, might produce patience in us, without the contrast of the promised happiness, even if faith were not invited to look for the "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," (2 Cor. iv. 17.) which God has prepared for all them that love the appearing of Christ. When our spirits are glorified in heavenly felicity, the remembrance of all earthly trials and sorrows will be obliterated, save only in-so-far as it may tend to heighten our enjoyment, and to discover more of the love, and wisdom, and faithfulness of that fatherly hand, which led us in all our earthly pilgrimage, and appointed for our benefit every part of our lot in this state of probation. Sweet was the rest of Canaan to the Israelites, after the perils of the "waste and howling wilderness;" sweeter far will be the rest of the heavenly Canaan, which remaineth "to the people of God," (Heb. iv. 9.) where troubles cease for ever, where those who come "out of great tribulation, are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple;" where "they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more,—for the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters, and God shall

wipe away all tears from their eyes ;" (Rev. viii. 14—17.) and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain ; for the former things are passed away." (Rev. xxi. 4.)

But afflictions are not always thus sanctified ; they do not yield " the peaceable fruits of righteousness" to all that are exercised with them.

There is in the human heart a disposition to strive against God, to resist his dispensations, whenever they thwart our own desires and inclinations. Some persons regard afflictions as the common lot of humanity, as trials to which all are equally exposed, although some escape more than others, and therefore they look no further into them, and are indifferent to the fruits and consequences of them. They regard them merely as inevitable evils, under which it is the interest of men to bear up with fortitude. Others think themselves unjustly singled out by the hand of God, and therefore they murmur and speak evil of the ways of God. Instead of inquiring, " Is there not a cause ?" with respect to their affliction, they compare their situation with that of others, who are exempt from present affliction, and then they refuse to humble themselves before the Lord. They harden their hearts against reproof, and fear not to utter imprecations against the Most High. Extreme sufferings do not always soften or subdue the human heart ; we read of some

who when they felt the severe strokes of the Almighty, “blasphemed the God of heaven, because of their pains, and repented not of their deeds.” (Rev. xvi. 11.) The most part of men, however, are driven by their sufferings and fears to acknowledge God. While under chastisement, and the terrors of a future state, they readily bow beneath the authority of their Maker, because they apprehend that they must soon stand before him as their Judge. They feel deep conviction of the extent and malignity of their sins, and tremble under the impending sentence of the law of God. Their repentance is apparently genuine and “after a godly manner ; (2 Cor. vii. 9.) but it is a feeling which proceeds more from the dread of punishment, than from a true hatred of iniquity. Their resolutions of amendment, bear some of the features of the renewed man ; but they are made more in the spirit of offering a bribe to heaven, to purchase their recovery to health, than from a sincere love of holiness. They are more aware of their actual transgressions, than of their depravity of nature,—of the evil of their ways, than of the corruption of their hearts ; they are more sensible of their obligations of duty, than of the weakness and insufficiency of their own efforts. Thus on the removal of their trial, they show what a small insight they have had into their own character ; they quickly forget their fears and convictions, their vows and promises, and return

to all their former evil habits with a love for the "lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life," (1 John ii. 16.) quickened by the abstinence which sickness compelled them to practise for a time; and thus they become more confirmed in evil, by the renewed relish with which they enter on its pursuit. Their late apprehended nearness to the invisible world, loosened their earthly bonds; but when they are restored to the present scene, to take an active part again in their former pleasures and occupations, their connection with a future state is again forgotten; they live as if because God was not in all their thoughts, therefore he did not see nor observe their ways; their attachment to perishing vanities revives, and supersedes the renunciation of every thing incompatible with the christian life and conversation, to which they so recently gave their willing assent.

A state of affliction is that condition in which God places men, that they may receive spiritual benefit, and instruction in divine things. We should remember, then, that if we have been afflicted, God has placed us in that school of instruction, where he imparts the most important and beneficial lessons; and if we have failed to improve the teaching, if we have received no benefit, we are accountable for the additional advantage offered in the chastisement of our Heavenly Father, and for the rejection of it. Let

us examine ourselves, then, on this important subject. God has called us to that condition, in which many obtain the most valuable blessings,—have we received them? Before we were afflicted, we went astray,—do we now keep God's word? Has it been good for us that we have been afflicted, that we might learn his statutes? (Ps. cxix. 67—71.) Let us pray that our sufferings and trials may be all so sanctified, that it may not only be said of us with respect to the common lot of mortality in which we participate, “Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward;” but also that with regard to our spiritual renovation, and the spiritual good derived from our sorrows, we may be able to join in the triumphant language of the Apostle, and say, “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh out for us a far more exceeding, and eternal weight of glory.” (2 Cor. iv. 17.)

TEST OF SPIRITUAL CHARACTER.

A TRUE test of character must be of great value in forming a judgment of our own powers, and of the expectations which we should entertain of other men. The manner in which society is established, and the difficulty of acquiring those things which are in the greatest estimation in the world, are powerful inducements to men to conceal their real characters from each other, and to endeavour by the resemblance of those qualities necessary to attain their purpose, to appear in a light which shall command the approval, and ensure the favour of those with whom they are connected.—Natural conscience and instruction, however limited, are sufficient to enable a man to form a correct estimate of his worldly character. He cannot be ignorant whether he is a friend to temperance, or the slave of excess,—whether he is dishonest, or an observer of strict justice,—whether he is deceitful, or a lover and maintainer of truth,—whether he is over-reaching and covetous, or a man of uprightness and integrity. The great difficulty is to ascertain the character of others, there being no test of universal application, and

no possibility of investigating the secrets veiled in every man's breast.—This difficulty extends also to spiritual concerns, to the christianity of men. The hypocrite and the christian are so nearly alike in the mere externals of religion, and the heart, the only true seat of religion, is so totally concealed from human observation, that no man is competent to pronounce on the spiritual condition of another in the sight of God—that is, where the appearance of devotion is maintained; for in cases of open profligacy and vice, the sinner bears about with him the broad stamp of the service of Satan. But, indeed, the opinion of others with respect to our spiritual state, is of small moment when compared with the conclusion on this point to which the Word of God brings us, when we set about a serious and solemn estimate of our own character, according to the decisions of that unerring standard.

Uncertainty is at all times painful, and in most cases disadvantageous; but total uncertainty, even so far as to exclude the Christian hope, respecting our state and character before God, must proceed from inattention to the plain tests which the Bible affords us. In so momentous an affair, as the decision of our eternal condition by the conduct which we pursue and the sentiments which we adopt on earth, it behoves every one to make a diligent inquiry how far the Scriptures, which

are man's only guide to the unseen world, will help him to ascertain his true, spiritual character. The Bible abounds with helps in pursuing so interesting an inquiry, and furnishes us with an excellent ground-work for such an investigation. Let us examine one of these Scriptural tests of character: "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." (Rom. viii. 9.) Who is this Spirit,—what constitutes the necessity of his operations,—and in what way do they prove that we are Christ's?

The Spirit is the name by which one of the persons in the adorable Trinity is known in the Scriptures. He is called the Spirit of God and of Christ. (Matt. iii. 16—Rom. viii. 9.) He is called the "Spirit of God," as being one with the Father, and because of his manifesting in his effects the visible operation of divine agency. He is called the "Spirit of Christ," as being the especial gift of Christ, according to the terms of the New Covenant, or the Covenant of grace. Under the former dispensation of the law, and indeed from the introduction of sin into the world, the great promise to mankind, and that which all nations desired, was the Christ, the Saviour. Under the dispensation of the Gospel, the great promise is the gift of the Spirit. When the Saviour was about to leave the world, and to be offered up as a sacrifice for sin, he comforted his disciples with the assurance that after his

departure, he would send the " Spirit of truth " unto them, from the Father, who should teach them, and abide with them for ever. (John xiv. 16—xv. 26.)

What, then, constitutes the necessity of the divine operations of the " Spirit of Christ ? " We find in the Scriptures, that the Spirit is both a Teacher and a Comforter ; therefore the condition of man, who is a recipient of his holy influences, and for whom they are provided, must be one which stands in the utmost need of instruction and of consolation.—God did not create man ignorant or unhappy ; he became so by sin. God did not create men with a natural disposition to evil, for God is holy, and therefore hates all sin ; he is also good and merciful, and loves his creatures ; but sin tends to make them miserable, and must lead to punishment. Man, therefore, acquired by disobedience that moral taint which disposes him to choose evil rather than good. His sin has introduced that change into his disposition, which renders him ignorant of spiritual things, without divine teaching ; prone to wander in the paths of error and danger, without divine guidance ; depraved in his heart and affections, without divine sanctification ; and the unhappy slave of Satan, without divine redemption. Man, in his original condition of uprightness, possessed, by the endowment of his Maker, a free will and a disposition to good ; there

was no mixture of evil in his heart ; he was also placed under an obligation to make the will of God his rule of action, and this will was clearly revealed, and manifested by the appointment of mild and beneficial laws. After the disobedience of man had destroyed that harmony, which reigned in all his powers while exercised in undeviating and willing observance of all the divine will, and had deprived him for ever of his innocence and his uprightness, his moral obligations were not thereby cancelled ; his duty was the same, although the original power of performing it was lost ; his free will remained, but it was unavailing to perfect obedience, because his affections had received an evil bias ; his obligation to good was in undiminished force, but his mind had become disposed to evil. Hence arises the necessity of the influences of the Holy Spirit. God requires nothing of his creatures but what they have ability to perform, either natural or imparted. The native strength of fallen man is insufficient to the duties of his condition ; his understanding has become dim and darkened, so that he cannot discern the importance of heavenly things, but gives himself to the pursuit of earthly objects ; the eternal world, in which his immortal existence must be either happy or wretched, is forgotten or disregarded in his eager attention to the interests of the present world, in which he spends but the dawn of his being ; the

will of God is but a secondary consideration in regulating his conduct, his primary object being the gratification of his own inclinations and desires ; human laws and human opinions influence his thoughts, words, and actions, while the fear of God exercises but a feeble control over him.

If we look at this picture of the moral condition of mankind, confirmed as it is by experience and observation, and sanctioned by the Word of God, must we not perceive and allow the absolute necessity of some agent in human redemption, whose office it shall be to teach, to guide, to strengthen, to sanctify, to restrain, to stablish, according to the peculiar circumstances of every individual ? With respect to a knowledge of his Creator, man is naturally more ignorant than the irrational animals. “ The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib,” (Isa. i. 3.) but men do not “ know the judgment of the Lord ;” therefore “ what wisdom is in them ?” (Jerem. viii. 7, 9.) Into what absurd and degrading notions of a Deity, have not the nations of the earth fallen ! What attributes—the disgrace, the shame, the curse of corrupt nature—have they not ascribed to their gods ! What perverse ideas of the divine will have they not entertained ; and what foolish, and cruel, and revolting services have they not offered as acceptable to God !—But it is not merely among the nations of the earth generally,

whether civilized and informed, or ignorant and barbarous, that we must look for proofs of the necessity of divine teaching with respect to a true knowledge of the Creator, for even the most favoured people, with the highest religious advantages, have been found wonderfully erroneous in their religious opinions. When the Messiah appeared on earth, the Jews, who might be expected to understand the nature and design of his ministry, obstinately rejected him; they did not know the testimony of their own Scriptures respecting him; he was the "Desire of all nations," (Hag. ii. 7.) but when "he was in the world, the world knew him not." (John i. 10.) Among the Jews he had been long foretold, even for many ages, as a Deliverer, as a Prophet to whom all were to listen; but when "he came unto his own, his own received him not." (John i. 11.) Even his disciples, who were favoured with his continual presence and teaching, who heard all his public instructions, and listened to his private admonitions, were surprisingly ignorant of his true character, nature and offices, and the design of his mission. After his death, they disbelieved the report of those who affirmed that he was risen, "for as yet they knew not the Scripture, that he must rise again from the dead." (John xx. 9.) It was not till after they had received the Holy Spirit of promise, and were endued with power from on high, that their under-

standings were opened, and they believed the Scriptures, and preached the Gospel according to the will and design of God.

And after men have arrived by divine teaching, at the true knowledge of God and their own condition on the earth, who is there that knows the "plague of his own heart," (1 Kings viii. 38.) who is not ready to acknowledge his insufficiency to maintain, by his own strength and wisdom, a conduct and conversation worthy of his high calling? What Christian is not disposed at all times to cry unto God, from a feeling of daily infirmities and corruptions, "Renew a right spirit within me;" (Ps. li. 10.) "Guide me with thy counsel;" (Ps. lxxiii. 24.) "Strengthen thou me according unto thy word;" (Ps. cxix. 28.) "Cleanse thou me from secret faults; keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins, let them not have dominion over me," (Ps. xix. 12, 13.) "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us; and establish thou the work of our hands upon us, yea, the work of our hands establish thou it." (Ps. xc. 17.)

It is not sufficient that the letter of the Gospel be made known to us, its spiritual import must be also communicated by divine teaching. The grace of God bestows salvation upon us, and the same grace imparts both the knowledge of the blessing, and the ability to avail ourselves of it; for Christians are said to have received the Spirit

which is of God, that they "might know the things that are freely given to us of God." (1 Cor. ii. 12.) It is this which proves the extent and the depth of man's depravity; just as the rich provision made for our redemption, proves the extent of human guilt and the depth of human misery.—It is in vain that a Saviour is provided for us, unless we receive also that teaching of the divine Spirit, which will convince us both of the necessity of our condition as sinners, and of the sufficiency there is in Christ to meet our every want. The disciples of the Redeemer knew him not in that character, till they had received the Holy Ghost. The balm that is in Gilead, and the Physician that is there, (Jerem. viii. 22.) are alike unknown and neglected, till divine influence shows us that "the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint." (Isa. i. 5.) In vain is the bread of life placed before us,—in vain for us does the water of life flow in a plenteous stream, till the Spirit of God imparts to us a spiritual appetite, and causes us to "hunger and thirst after righteousness." (Matt. v. 6. In short, we cannot discern spiritual things without spiritual illumination, nor seek heavenly things without heavenly-mindedness; "for what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God;" and "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolish-

ness unto him ; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Cor. ii. 11—14.) Thus is the necessity of divine influence established, both on account of the inability and the depravity of man ; by the one he cannot know divine things while in his natural state, and by the other he will not receive them.

We are next to inquire in what way the influences of the Holy Spirit do prove that we are Christ's. " If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." The operations of the Holy Spirit on the mind of man, in enlightening his understanding, sanctifying his heart, and spiritualizing his affections, are known by the term *conversion*, which shows us also the extent of these operations. Although this term conversion cannot apply to us in its original acceptation—a renunciation of idolatry, and an embracing of the religion of Jesus Christ ; yet in its fullest signification of a total change—a turning of the back on former pursuits, (so far as they are opposed to the Gospel,) and a steadfast directing of the countenance towards new objects, it very fitly expresses the change which takes place in every man's mind who breaks off his sins by righteousness, (Dan. iv. 27.) and exchanges the love of the world for the single and supreme love of God. If conversion implied no more than a change of profession—Christianity for heathenism—we should not find it expressed in Scripture by

such strong language, or described by such striking figures, when manifest reference is made to a change which must take place in all, both *Jew* and *Gentile*. It is called a new creation ; “ If *any man* be in Christ, he is a new creature ;” (2 Cor. v. 17.) “ In Christ Jesus neither *circumcision* availeth any thing nor *uncircumcision*, but a new creature ;” (Gal. vi. 15.) “ Put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” (Eph. iv. 24.) It is termed a resurrection from death unto life ; “ Yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead.” (Rom. vi. 13.)

Now although some of these passages may apply primarily to the character and condition of those persons, who were converted from heathenism to the worship of the only true God and our Saviour Christ, yet the connexion in which they stand, and the similarity of expression throughout the Scriptures, when describing those who are taught of God, and thereby become true and acceptable worshippers of God, prove that they refer also to that inward and spiritual change which takes place in every man who receives the offered influences of the Holy Spirit, and by that teaching becomes wise unto salvation.

Those who have the Spirit of Christ, possess a principle of which the world (using the term in a Scriptural sense) has no conception. The Christian’s “ life is hid with Christ in God ;” (Colos.

iii. 3.) it is hid from the world as to its nature, properties, and privileges. "A stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy." (Prov. xiv. 10.) The worldly man knows nothing of the Christian's hopes and fears, his desires, his motives, his aims, and his prayers. At a loss to account for his conduct, his renunciation of the things of this world as the chief good, and his steadfast refusal to "run with them to the same excess of riot," (1 Pet. iv. 4.) the men of the world account his life to be madness. It is an undoubted fact, that if a man lives and acts as one who has received on his heart the full impression of the solemnities of eternity, if he lives and acts as one who acknowledges the divine authority which said—"Strive to enter in at the strait gate;" (Luke xiii. 24.) "*Seek ye first* the kingdom of God;" (Matt. vi. 33.)—We say it is an undoubted fact, that he subjects himself to reproach, to misrepresentation, if not to direct acts of persecution for righteousness sake. Whence can this proceed? Not from dislike to the man:—he was, perhaps, before that change in heart and conduct which marks him as one of the devoted servants of Christ, the bosom friend of those who now are ready to disclaim him, and to charge his zeal for godliness as a breach of some of the laws of human intercourse, and his love of God as hatred of mankind. This enmity must proceed from the corruption of the human heart, which rejects the

reproofs of the Gospel, and leads men to dislike those whose holy life furnishes a standing reproof of their own unholy conduct. Hence it is that a man may be ingenious in discovering new vices, or in inventing new modes of perpetrating common ones; he may be a leader in folly and excess, and yet he may preserve the friendship of the world, and have the character of being a good sort of a man, a man with a good heart. But let him forsake these sins, renounce his associates in folly and transgression, and pronounce the words *Christ* and *Grace* with a serious air and a solemnity of mind, as one who builds on them his hope of everlasting life and happiness, and he will be shunned almost as one possessed by an evil spirit. His conduct will now be rigidly watched,—not for the commendable purpose of imitation, but in the secret and wicked desire of witnessing some inconsistency, of beholding some fall from the eminence of holiness which he is endeavouring to ascend; and he, who, while he lived in iniquity and hated the fear of God, was pronounced to be a man with a good heart, is suddenly discovered to be a weak enthusiast, a misanthropical fanatic, a base hypocrite! This enmity proves, that even among those who are called Christians, there is a conversion requisite which implants the love of God, and rectifies the love of our neighbour. This enmity is natural to the human heart, that is, it is the effect

of original sin ; it has existed in all ages of the world ; “ Mine heritage,” saith the Lord, “ is unto me as a speckled bird, the birds round about her are against her.” (Jerem. xii. 9.) “ The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other.” (Gal. v. 17.)

The true test of being Christ's, that is, of being an inheritor of his salvation, is the possessing of his Spirit. The evidence of possessing this Spirit, will be internally known to the Christian by a consciousness of true repentance, and of lively faith, and of supreme love to God ; and it will be externally shown to others by a holy walk and conversation. Religion is properly the intercourse that takes place between God and the soul of man ; it is the determination of the heart, and the disposition of the spirit towards God ; but it should manifest itself in all our transactions with each other in the world. That is a vain religion which consists only of formal devotional services, or of pretended extraordinary communion with God in prayer, or of enthusiastic notions of the certainty of salvation on the ground of what is called eternal election—irrespective of the moral conduct of its objects, while the heart is manifestly uninfluenced, and the life and conversation are vicious and immoral. Where there is a divine intercourse with God, and with spiritual subjects, the heart cannot remain uninfluenced

by such solemnities, by such interesting though unseen realities as Revelation discloses ; and the conduct must also be under the guidance and direction of that hallowed spirit which true religion diffuses and maintains in the soul. The Spirit of Christ is not a mere notion ; it is not a strong persuasion of individual safety and destined happiness, grounded on some vague and indefinite conceits of the imagination, on dreams and pretended revelations, on passages of Scripture suddenly and strongly impressed on the mind without reasonable design or order. It is a principle that is sober, rational, serious, and, above all, exercising a moral influence over the heart and conduct. It does not so much impart to men a strong persuasion of their salvation, as prepare them for the enjoyment of it. It does not fill them with visionary notions of superiority, merely on the account of their religious creed, but clothes them with humility, and makes them compassionate, kind, diligent, honest, useful. Its influence is not merely felt in the mind, it is seen in the life ; it is not a solitary, selfish principle, it is social, diffusing universal good-will. It is not a morose, sectarian spirit, which says to others, "Stand by thyself, for I am holier than thou," (Isa. lxxv. 5.) and denounces all who do not come within its pale, as haters of God and godliness, and friends of the world ; but it loves all who love our Lord Jesus Christ ; (Ephes. vi. 24.) it has imbibed

the spirit of that Scriptural saying, which testifies that "God is no respecter of persons;" (Acts x. 34.) and it therefore regards as brethren, all who in every place fear God and work righteousness.—In a word, it is the giver of faith to man, but it also invariably produces all the good works of holy obedience, which are the sole evidence of genuine faith.

The religion which is the offspring of the Spirit of Christ, is a religion of the heart and conduct, and not merely of the tongue and profession. It will be of no avail to us to have the subject of religion continually on our lips, unless our life be also under its predominance and guidance. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." (Matt. vii. 21.) "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can (*this*¹) faith save him?" (James ii. 14.) Religious knowledge is indispensable to the forming of right notions of God, and of our condition on the earth; but knowledge is not the whole of religion; it is an essential part in a certain degree; but as it is of very various attainments, we cannot make it by itself, a test of christian character. A holy practice, the result of true religious knowledge, and a pious

¹ ἡ πίστις. This seems an important improvement in the translation of this passage, as suggested by some critics.

zeal, proportionate to the degree of knowledge attained, form the best evidence of a christian character. "If ye know these things," said our Lord, "happy are ye if ye do them." (John xiii. 17.) "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." (James i. 22.) Knowledge imposes the obligation to practice; for to this end it is given to us by God: "therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." (James iv. 17.) God has provided a Deliverer to effect men's salvation; but he says to us with the gift, 'Live worthy of this redemption.' He has told us what he wishes us to be and to do, and he loves obedience to his will, and he assuredly will reward it.

Another, and an important fruit of the Spirit of Christ, is a due and proper estimation of the world, so as not to be attached to it in a degree hurtful to our spiritual prosperity, not to have our hearts and affections set on it as our portion, as an abiding good. An early writer,* describing the primitive christians, says, 'they were dead to all ideas of worldly honour and dignity; nothing was more foreign to them than political concerns; the whole world was their republic.'—We ought to imitate them in the spirit, although we are not called upon to follow them in the very letter of their conduct. The state of society in which

* Tertullian.

they lived, was a main cause of that abstraction from the world, which marked their character. To be wholly separate from idolatry, as christianity demanded, they were of necessity cut off from all participation in civil authority; for to sacrifice to false gods, and to swear in an idolatrous manner by the emperor, were the tests of loyalty and good citizenship in those days. Nevertheless, as they drank at the fountain-head of the waters of life, we shall do well to imbibe as much of their spirit, and imitate as much of their conduct, as is consistent with our present obligations, and practicable in our present circumstances.

As this world was our original destination, at least, the seat of unmixed happiness, the love of it is deeply rooted in our hearts. We are too often induced by its cares and its pleasures, to forget and neglect our spiritual welfare. Our hopes and fears are too much regulated and influenced by the events of the present life; so much so, that our service of God often takes its character of cheerfulness or of depression from the state of our worldly circumstances. When prosperity smiles on us, we forget that it proceeds from God, and should therefore lead us to him in devout and thankful acknowledgment. And when matters bear a dull aspect, and the lowering clouds of Providence threaten a heavy storm, we are too apt to forget that it will be the storm of Providence, that all events are in the

hands of our Heavenly Father, and that it is a privilege to discern his hand in every event. We often think that a little more of this or that thing, would be a little better for us ; but what know we ? Even the little that we do possess, has often power to exclude a care for the interests of eternity. What is wholly unconnected with these interests, is transitory, and should not painfully awaken our anxieties, or unduly attract our affections. We might well repine under scanty supplies of earthly riches, if we were also to be poor in eternity because poverty had been our lot here. We might well murmur with impatience under pain, or disease, or reproaches here, if these evils could pursue us beyond the grave. But they will all end with life ; they cannot so much as touch the threshold of the golden gates, much less walk in the streets of the New Jerusalem.

The Spirit of Christ is a Spirit of love and of peace. Its recipients are endowed with meekness, patience, and forbearance ; they observe their temper and conduct, and watch over their motives and intentions rather than their frames of mind. The conduct of the early christians towards each other, was regulated by the law of Christ, (John xiii. 34.) so that their enemies said of them, ‘ see how these christians love one another.’ Were any of their brethren in distress ? They were prompt to bear one another’s burdens. The same accusers and enemies who charged them

with madness, and with hatred to all mankind, were compelled to acknowledge that they used incredible despatch in affording relief to the distressed; and that their lives were holy and blameless.—

Self-denial is also a fruit of this Spirit of Christ. This grace was divinely exemplified in Christ himself. “He was rich as Lord and Creator of all things, but for our sakes he became poor.” His command to us is, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” (Matt. xvi. 24.) It has been well remarked that, ‘many in their own will resolve to be martyrs, who cannot bear so much as only a contradiction.’*

This Spirit is called the “Spirit of Christ,” not only because he is the example and pattern of every grace, but also because he is the Author and Bestower of them all. They that partake of this Spirit, will aim at following the example of Christ, because his Spirit must inspire the love of those things which are acceptable to God. What flows from the Spirit of Christ, must be conformable to the pattern of Christ.—The depravity and ignorance of man are the cause of the necessity of the influence of the Spirit of Christ; and the Scriptural declaration that unless we partake of this Spirit we are none of Christ’s, establishes

* Mason.

the importance of his influence. That unhappy necessity in the condition of man, which renders the teaching and strength of the Holy Spirit indispensable to him, is met by the divine mercy which offers this Spirit freely to all. None pass through the trials and temptations of this life, without the offered aid of divine influence—nay, all receive this influence, but many, very many “do always resist the Holy Ghost.” (Acts vii. 51.) They must first quench this Spirit, before they can give themselves up to the deeds of darkness, for this is “the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” (John i. 9.) Let us, then, “covet earnestly” the gifts of the Spirit, according to their “diversities of operations,” (1 Cor. xii. 4.) as suited to our individual necessities and conditions; that we may obtain both the teaching, and help, and sanctification, and comfort of this Spirit.—May the “God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory,” give unto us “the Spirit of wisdom and revelation,” (Eph. i. 17.) and grant that “according to the riches of his glory,” we may be “strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man,” (Eph. iii. 16.) and may manifest in our lives all its holy fruits of “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance,” (Gal. v. 22, 23.) that we may “abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost.” (Rom. xv. 13.)

the importance of his influence. This influence is necessary in the condition of man, which renders the teaching and strength of the Holy Spirit indispensable to him, as met by the divine mercy which offers him all.

THE ATONEMENT.

If we reflect on the brief existence which man enjoys in this lower world, and on the unseen wonders of a future state, we shall find that our attention can scarcely be occupied by a more important or more interesting subject than an inquiry into the true state and condition of man upon the earth, and the prospects held out to him in another and future state of being. Every thing proves that mankind are placed under the moral government of their Creator.—That men are rational beings, is a sufficient proof that they are accountable for their conduct; because it is evidently absurd to suppose that God should endow his creatures with knowledge to regulate their lives, with judgment to discern between good and evil, with freedom of will to choose and adopt their own course of action, and yet subject them to no control of divine authority—no rule of divine government—no accountableness to a divine tribunal. Natural religion, without the aid of revelation, teaches us that God is an observer of right and wrong, that our conduct is not indifferent to him, and that he is the rewarder of goodness, and the avenger of transgression.—

Human laws for the regulation of society are founded on the presumption that there is a divine law, and that this law sanctions their establishment. Civilized society, is, indeed, so constituted as to make a vast variety of shades in the conduct of men, as complying with or departing from its manifold regulations; but the broad distinction between right and wrong is deeply impressed on the natural conscience of every individual. There is a moral rectitude which commends itself to every man's bosom; and there is a turpitude of conduct which every heart must condemn. The deceitfulness of sin is very subtle, and imposes on us under a thousand forms and by a great variety of modes of attack. It sometimes warps and perverts the judgment, without in any great degree corrupting the heart and the will; and at other times it depraves the affections, and through them debases and enslaves the judgment. But in no case can it so degrade, so corrupt, so mislead, as to rid a man intirely of conviction: no one is so blinded and hardened as to imagine himself altogether without transgression—wholly free from sin. The degree of our knowledge of evil depends upon the information which we possess, respecting the purity and extent of the law under which we are placed, and the justice and truth of the law-giver.

There is a natural law common to all mankind; and there is a written law communicated by re-

velation to certain portions of the human race. The great body of men, called in Scripture the Gentiles, had originally so much of the law of God written in their hearts, as might form a law unto themselves, whereby to regulate their conduct, their conscience bearing witness to their actions whether they were good or evil, and accordingly accusing or excusing them. (Rom. ii. 14, 15.) And the moral law contained in the Ten Commandments, and in the various explanations and comments on them in different parts of Scripture, gave to the Jews, and through them to us, a more enlarged view of the duty of man, and of the guilt incurred by the violation of commands, that were to be interpreted not merely according to the letter, but according to an extended spiritual sense and application. It is by this law that we arrive at the true knowledge of sin, and consequently of our true condition on the earth. Because, man being both rational and accountable, his present circumstances must be in a very great measure influenced by his innocence or his guilt, by his obedience or his rebellion : and his future state must depend altogether on these, that is, as viewed in connexion with the terms on which the Gospel is preached to man.

The condition of man here, is that of a being placed under the power of a law which he has violated ; and consequently he is exposed to all

the evils of that violation, whether affecting his body or the faculties of his soul, whether subjecting him to sorrow, pain, and death, or to ignorance, depravity, and destitution of spiritual strength. The actual and present fruits of sin are suffered by all mankind, in a greater or less degree, and they are in danger of the threatened and future evils. If we look into the world, in how many alarming forms do sorrow and suffering appear; how long is the grievous catalogue of human woe! And the whole is the consequence of sin; although many of the inferior parts may be the more immediate and natural result of the particular imprudence and misconduct of individuals. Sin, taking the term in its most comprehensive sense, sin is chargeable with the entire mass of human suffering. God has placed us from the beginning under a law, the violation of which, (and all have broken it, from Adam to the present generation of men,) subjects us to the penalties denounced against all transgressors. It is this relation in which we stand towards God as our moral Governor, which constitutes the chief and most important feature in our condition. The generality of men, in considering the circumstances of their condition, do not take into the number the relation in which they stand towards God their Creator, their Preserver, and their Judge. They leave out too much the consideration of their guilty condition as transgressors of

God's holy law, and their helpless condition as sinners who have lost their original uprightness and spiritual strength. And, in fact, this ignorance of our true condition, is a part of our depravity, and that which especially renders a revelation from heaven necessary for us.

The natural evils of sin, as affecting the body and outward circumstances, are acknowledged by all, because they are felt by all in some measure; and all are conscious that they are exposed to them in the greatest degree. But the spiritual evils resulting from the fall of man, although universal, are not so readily allowed; because men are unwilling to make the humiliating concessions which are inseparable from the admission of these evils in their full extent; and because they do not wish to resign all hope of future happiness, as grounded in some degree on their own personal merits. But he who rightly receives the Holy Scriptures, must receive all that they declare concerning the spiritual necessities and the moral degradation of mankind; and he will find that deep as is the misery there represented, dark and strong as are the features of human depravity there drawn, and helpless and ruined as is the condition there described, yet the same revelation supplies the knowledge of a deliverance from our wretchedness, places before us a bright prospect of restoration, and plainly points out the way of complete redemption. Such is the extent of man's depravity,

that he dislikes those who faithfully declare to him all the circumstances of his condition. And how, indeed, can it be otherwise, when he naturally dislikes God his Maker ! When we say *naturally*, we do not mean according to the original constitution of his nature, but in consequence of the depravation of that nature, which is so great that sin is as it were natural to man. It may seem a very harsh expression to say that man hates his Maker ; but facts warrant the use of it. We read in Scripture of those who hate God ; (Rom. i. 30.) and this not merely as an extraordinary degree of malignity in evil, but as a part of depravity common to all. And wherefore do they hate God ? They are ready to acknowledge his goodness and mercy, of which they daily partake. They know themselves to be the work of his hands, and the objects of his care. They profess to believe in his mercy, and to look forward to a participation in it, even to everlasting life. All this they know and profess ; but they love their sins, and God has denounced punishment against the sinner, and therefore they love him not ; that is, they love their sins more than God, and this is called in Scripture being “ haters of God.” Men habitually forget the God that made them, and desire not the knowledge of his ways or of his will. The guilty conscience fears, and therefore hates God : it dislikes the restraint of the law, and therefore cannot love the law-giver. The

thought of God is a trouble to men—to unrenewed men, because it necessarily brings with it to their minds the thought of their own guilt, and consequently of the anger of God.

If such be the wretched condition—such the circumstances of man, what are the consequences which must result to the whole world, if there be no Deliverer found? What are the inferences which must be drawn, laying aside the light which revelation affords us? We must either infer (1) that all men will sink into hopeless and interminable misery: but this is contrary to all true notions of the divine compassion and goodness, and to what we must suppose to have been the original design of God in the creation of man. We cannot reconcile the dominion of evil to such an extent as this, with the government of a Supreme Being of infinite love and wisdom and mercy. Or, we must infer (2) that God will annihilate mankind, as beings who have rendered themselves utterly unworthy of his notice and favour: but we have no proof of this having ever been done in any part of God's creation; nor is the supposition reconcilable with the true knowledge of the works of God, which must all be perfect either in original formation, or eventual design. There is nothing in the past experience of the world to countenance such an expectation, and certainly nothing of the kind can be properly inferred from what we see and know of the

divine government. Or, we must conclude (3) that God will alter the nature, and terms, and requirements of his law; but this would seem to argue mistake in the first enunciation of the law, or injustice in the conditions which it imposes, or variability in the law-giver, who has, nevertheless, declared that "it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail." (Luke xvi. 7.) Our Law-giver, who was also our Creator, could not possibly make any mistake in what ought to be the terms and requirements of the law under which he intended to place us, either as befitting his own authority, holiness, justice, or other perfections, or as suited to our condition as the work of his hands, and endowed at first with righteousness and true holiness, and afterwards the subjects of depravity and destitute of spiritual ability. Laws which are unjust or deficient in any of their terms, must proceed from a fallible source, and so partake of the frailty inherent in him who framed them. But the law under which we find ourselves situated, is the work of God himself; it emanates from the fountain of unspotted purity and eternal truth. It is holy, just, and good, as its Great Author is holy, just, and good; being as it were a transcript of his divine perfections, and declaring to us the measure in which we are commanded to imitate Supreme Goodness. This law cannot then be repealed, unless we can suppose weakness in infinite power,

mistake in infinite knowledge, deficiency in infinite perfection, error in infinite truth,—unless we despoil God of his perfections or dethrone him from his government and dominion. We must infer then (4) that God will by some means pardon the sinner, without repealing his law ; and restore him to his favour, without infringing on the demands of his justice and truth. And this is the point to which we are brought, in the consideration of the meaning of those words uttered by the expiring Redeemer ; “ It is finished.” (John xiv. 30.) The means of pardon are found in the death and obedience of Christ ; his mediation is the ground of the sinner’s restoration to divine favour.—When our Lord pronounced these words, he declared that he had perfected all that he came into the world to accomplish, that he had fulfilled what was spoken in antient prophecy, and had made an end of sin, had made reconciliation for iniquity, and had brought in everlasting righteousness.

We have already seen the necessity of an atonement, in the condition of man, and the requirements of God’s law : we must now consider the nature of this atonement, as made by the Lord Jesus Christ.—The atonement of which man stood in need, was one which should in every way be a substitute for himself, and which should make full satisfaction to divine justice. We must be assured that such an atonement has

indeed been made, or we shall hesitate to place that reliance upon it which will secure peace to a conscience tenderly alive to the deserts of sin. We need an atonement that will not only open a way of safe access to God, but that can also ease the conscience, and make it pleasant and delightful to us to think of God—to pray to him as to a Father—to trust in him as a friend. The fears of man, suggested by a guilty conscience, render it necessary to his peace, that the nature of the atonement made for him, should be fully displayed in its perfection and suitableness. This atonement is found alone in the mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ; and it is fully displayed to us in the Word of God.

Prophecy described the Saviour in such glowing terms, as to excite the hopes of the children of men from the most antient times, and to cause the Redeemer to be earnestly looked for as the “desire of all nations.” (Haggai. ii 7.) The Gospel shows the fulfilment of all the expectations which prophecy raised, in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ is now made to us all that we stand in need of as sinners. He is “wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” (1. Cor. i. 30.) All men feel the necessity of some atonement to be made on account of universal guilt; and pride, natural to the mind of fallen man, leads him in his ignorance to endeavour to offer one of his own procuring

and purchase to God, as a ground whereon to build the hope of pardon and eternal life, if not as a plea whereby he may claim these inestimable benefits. Hence it is that we find in heathen nations the prevailing notion of a sacrifice, the universal idea of the necessity of interposing something by way of reconciliation between an offended Deity and his guilty creatures. And hence it is that in Christian lands we find so many trusting to their own righteousness, and leaning on the supposed merit of their own performances to recommend them to God, to make their peace with him, and to procure a title to heaven.

But the only true atonement for sin has already been made by Christ, and accepted by God. The guilt of sin cannot be put away by any other blood than the blood of Christ; nor is it necessary that any other should be sought after, since the "blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." (1 John i. 7.)—Moreover, what have we of our own performance that we can offer to God, as worthy of his acceptance, much less as a plea on which to ground a claim to the reward of eternal life? Are we not sinners? Where, then, is our righteousness? One transgression is sufficient to render null and void, as a ground of justification, whole years of constant obedience; if, indeed that man could be found whose life would bear the scrutiny of God's judgment, and

the trial of his law, not for years, but for a single day. We may well ask with the Patriarch Job, "How should man be just with God? If he will contend with him, he cannot answer him one of a thousand." (Job ix. 2, 3.) Salvation is but a small benefit, if it could have been procured by the efforts of fallen man, without the mediation of Christ. Why was that wonderful provision made for us in the death of the Son of God,—why was the amazing expense of his precious blood incurred, if redemption could have been obtained by any other means,—if it could have been procured by the deficient obedience, the feeble efforts of sinful man! It does not become man to justify his conduct before God, or to attempt to prove himself worthy of eternal life, but his duty is to confess his sins, that he may find mercy; to cry to the Redeemer, "Lord, save me;" and to "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus," that he may "win Christ, and be found in him, not having" his own "righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." (Phil. iii. 8, 9.)

The nature of the atonement which Christ has offered, constitutes its exact suitableness to our condition. It is a satisfaction for sin—for the violation of God's holy and just law; and it is the only proper ground and efficient plea for our

redemption.—In order to make satisfaction for sin, the offering made must be of infinite value, and the offerer himself a divine Being ; inasmuch as no other could supply the necessary offering. If we rightly regard the purity and immutable truth of God, we cannot suppose that his anger against sin can be appeased, or his threatenings against the sinner averted, or the dignity of his law maintained, by any thing which human effort could supply in the place of intire and undeviating obedience.—Only the atonement which Christ has made, possesses in itself every necessary qualification for being substituted in the room of a guilty world. On him as man the penalty was inflicted ; by him the suffering was endured ; his Deity stamped an infinite value on these sufferings, and made the penalty an amends to the law, and rendered his obedience perfect. Aware of his insufficiency, and conscious of his guilt, man, under the deep conviction of the perils of his condition, would fall into utter hopelessness and despair, if he had no other resource than his own strength. But the knowledge and full reception of the atonement of Jesus Christ, not merely excites hope in his breast, but offers a ground for assured confidence. Nothing which the mis-directed invention of man has substituted as a mediator between God and himself, could ever give peace to his mind, or intirely rid him of apprehension. Even the

sacrifices under the Mosaic law, though of divine appointment, did not of themselves give rest to the troubled conscience ; for the law being but a “ shadow of good things to come,” could not by its sacrifices “ make the comers thereunto perfect ;” otherwise, the worshippers being once cleansed would have been henceforth without the “ conscience of sins ;” (Heb. x. 1, 2.) that is, free from the dread of the condemning power of sin hereafter. The design of these sacrifices was not to “ take away sins,” but to lead the worshippers to the great atonement which was to be made in the “ fulness of time,” and to which their faith was ever to be directed, and on which their reliance for pardon was to be placed. The insufficiency of these offerings of “ the blood of bulls and of goats,” was seen in the constant repetition of them : but the perfection of Christ’s atonement rendered its repetition unnecessary ; for “ by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” (Heb. x. 14.)

Here, then, is our strong-hold ; while we remain in it we are sheltered from the storm of divine wrath, we are safe from the denunciations of a broken law. If we quit this sanctuary, the avenger may overtake us at any moment, and our guilty souls may be offered in eternal perdition as a just payment to the demands of God’s holy law. If we spend our days in vainly endeavouring to atone for sin by our own efforts, the

frail shelter which we erect, and under which we hope to be safe, will only hide from us the impending danger, and thus lull us into deceitful repose till "sudden destruction" come upon us. O, let us, then, look unto him who alone bringeth salvation; let us attend to the important meaning of that solemn declaration which he uttered on the cross.—This declaration is full of peace and consolation to every soul, that is convinced of the evil of sin, and feels its own helpless and dangerous condition. When Christ exclaimed "It is finished," what did the words imply? They implied that the work which an Almighty arm alone could execute, was completed,—that God had become the Saviour of men unable to save themselves,—that a divine arm had interposed, where the force of men and angels was powerless,—that what divine wisdom alone had planned and devised, divine power alone had performed,—that sin, as to the punishment of it, was abolished,—that God was reconciled,—that man was pardoned,—that the wiles of Satan were confounded, and his malignity counteracted,—that the grave was vanquished,—that death was beneath the feet of the conqueror,—that hell, or the place of departed spirits, was no longer the hopeless prison of the dead; and that heaven, with its wide and glorious portals, was open to admit the repentant and redeemed children of men!

Many are the delusions which keep men back from seeking the knowledge of this atonement. They rest satisfied with the mere knowledge that Christ hath uttered the words, "It is finished," and that he is called The Saviour, and that through him God is merciful. They stop here, and pass not the bare knowledge of the fact ; they make no inquiry whether they are seeking an interest in it, in the right, and true, and Scriptural way—whether their lives and hearts are in conformity, or at variance, with the terms on which the benefits of this atonement are offered to them. They magnify the importance of earthly duties and relative obligations, and convert them into excuses for neglecting the most important of all concerns—the safety of the soul. They forget that the offer of pardon and reconciliation is limited to a certain period, which period will terminate with their lives ; and that this termination may be sudden, may be much earlier than they expect, may find them in a state of alienation from God ! And then, awful consideration ! the words, "It is finished," will seal their condemnation ! May we now flee for refuge to the hope set before us, that these words may be the source of our present peace, the ground of our reliance at the hour of death, and the security of our everlasting happiness !

JUSTIFICATION.

THERE are various orders and degrees of intellect among men, and consequently various degrees of impression on their minds as to the peculiarity of their situation and condition. Some are affected by fear, while others in the same circumstances look on with indifference, and even with levity and carelessness. The knowledge of danger does not always make men anxious to know by what means it may be averted ; but often, on the contrary, induces a hardness which sets impending evil at defiance, or which seeks to lose the remembrance of it in the unbridled indulgence of depraved passions, and the gratification of unruly and unholy desires.—The same events which lead some persons to serious reflection, to sorrow, to repentance, to a change of sentiments and conduct, excite in others none of these feelings, produce none of these happy effects ; but, on the contrary, often furnish matter for jest and ridicule, and confirm them in their errors. And even in the same person, circumstances which yesterday had a strong and decided effect on his mind, to-day pass unnoticed and without any influence ; and the condition of to-

day, which he now heeds not nor regards, to-morrow shall affect him with the liveliest sensations, and be productive of the most important results. Such are the varieties often found in the history of the human mind ; such are its contradictions, its aberrations, its unaccountable fickleness and perversity.

But, notwithstanding this contrariety and opposition of character in various minds, and even in the same person at different times ; none, we may suppose, are to be found, who have not at some one time felt some degree of concern and anxiety respecting the safety and welfare of their souls. That Divine Spirit which is given to all men, and “ which lighteth every man that cometh into the world,” (John i. 9.) suggests at one time or another, and in a greater or less degree, according to the peculiarity of the individual, some serious inquiry—some concern respecting his spiritual welfare. It is to the resistance which is offered to this Spirit, that we are to attribute the too-prevalent disregard of those things which belong to man’s everlasting peace, and the too-general indifference with regard to the important inquiry what our present character is in the sight of God, and how we shall appear before him, when summoned to judgment. There is much anxiety felt, and much concern exhibited respecting the estimation of the world, and the opinions entertained by men of their

fellow-creatures ; but how few are willing to experience more than a momentary solicitude concerning the judgment which their Maker will pass on them ! It is indeed of great value to have a good reputation, and it is a matter of no small moment to stand fair in the opinions of men ; because, for the most part, such reputation must be earned by good conduct, at least by an outward regard to the decencies and proprieties of life. And much of the good which a man is able to do, depends on the character which he maintains in society. But the evil lies in making this worldly reputation the chief end of our endeavours—the great object of our desires, and forgetting that we are accountable to God, and must either stand or fall—and that finally and eternally—according to the divine judgment and decision on our spiritual character.

With the man who reflects on his character as a sinner, and on the certainty of his appearing in judgment before that Being who “ weigheth the spirits,” (Prov. xvi. 2.) the question, “ Where-with shall I come before God,” (Mic. vi. 6.) is a very natural one ; it is an inquiry into which he is disposed to enter with the greatest solemnity and earnestness, and with the most ardent desire to arrive at a right and safe conclusion.—The guilty conscience testifies that some plea is wanted, which may be effectual when offered to God, as a ground of pardon and acceptance ; and

hence arises a very natural anxiety to know wherewith we shall come before God. Many are the answers which have been given to this most important question, and various are the methods which men have pursued in seeking a way of safe access to God. A melancholy catalogue might be drawn up of the many absurd, and the many cruel inventions, which have been substituted for the spiritual and acceptable service of God. Such a catalogue would embrace the numerous victims sacrificed in the fires lighted up by the fierce and unrelenting rites of the Druids,—the pains, and mortifications, and self-inflicted tortures of the Hindoo,—the antient bloody offerings to Moloch,—the numberless ceremonies and vain offerings of the Greeks and Romans, and all the horrid rites and foolish ceremonials of Pagan mythology. None of these systems afforded any true peace to the votaries ; and if they had conscientiously discharged all the minute duties enjoined, and had inflicted on themselves all the tortures of fire and sword—of hunger and thirst, which were supposed to be efficacious in putting away sin ; yet reason, if suffered to speak, must have told them that these things, so contrary to the nature of man—to the laws of his being, and to the evident design of his existence, cannot be acceptable to God, or procure for them future happiness.

Men of reflection, who have considered the

mode of seeking the favour of the Deity by self-inflicted tortures, have exclaimed against so foolish and barbarous a method. Seneca observes, that fanaticism has led many persons to endeavour to appease the gods by methods which men would not even pursue in taking revenge; and adds that gods who desire to be worshipped after such a manner, deserve not to have any worship paid to them; for the most cruel of tyrants, who have mangled and tortured those who fell into their power, have never commanded any to torture themselves.* Therefore those who describe the Deity as pleased with these wilful lacerations and sufferings, do represent him in a worse light than a wicked tyrant; and yet the votaries of such fanaticism are not confined to the followers of a Pagan mythology. There is a church, calling itself holy, and arrogating the title of the sole church of Christ, which represents the God of the New Covenant as well pleased with painful pilgrimages, with violence offered to the best natural feelings, with abstinence from the most endearing social ties, with the endurance of the extremes of hunger and thirst, and with the infliction of severe lacerations of the body! How pleasant it is to turn from these irrational systems,

* “*Tantus est perturbatæ mentis furor, ut sic Dii placentur, quemadmodum ne homines quidem sæviunt. Dii autem nullo debent coli genere, si et hoc volunt. Tetrinni tyranni laceraverunt aliquorum membra; neminem lacerare jusserunt.*”

to a method of justification which is more reasonable, as well as Scriptural;—a method which promotes our present happiness and peace, as well as secures our future safety; a method not at variance with any of the divine perfections, and yet exactly suited to our necessities, and adapted to our conditions; a method in which the true interests of man are eminently consulted, and in which the wisdom and power of God are conspicuously manifested.

The question “Wherewith shall I come before God?” is no other than an inquiry how we shall obtain justification in the sight of God our Judge.—Justification is a judicial declaration that a man is either found guiltless of charges adduced against him, or that in consequence of reparation made, or penalty endured, he is pronounced to be completely absolved from all condemnation, and is placed, in the eyes of the law, in the situation of an innocent person. The justification of the Scriptures is an act of God’s grace, by which he freely pardons and accounts as righteous, in consideration of the obedience and death of Christ, all those repentant sinners who believe on the name of his well-beloved Son, and who declare and manifest their faith by abounding in good works.

To answer the question fully, “Wherewith shall I come before God?” we must consider the pleas which might be offered to divine justice as

grounds of justification ; in order that we may detect those which in Scripture are called a “ refuge of lies,” (Isa. xxxviii. 17.) and may exhibit clearly God’s method of justification.

If we will come to God to claim his favour as of debt, we must come as those who have never sinned—who have observed in all points the requirements of God’s law. But it is evident that we have no such righteousness as this to offer ; we are born in sin, and have been guilty of innumerable actual transgressions of the divine law. Ours cannot be a claim of right, because we are unable to show any title on which such a pretension might be grounded.—Where then is our refuge ? What is the resource which the Gospel offers to us in this emergency ? Christ has become a substitute for us. He was born under the same law to which we are amenable, and which we have violated ; and he has fully observed all its commands. He is indeed such a high priest as we stood in need of, being “ holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” (Heb. vii. 26.) He did not come to bring us salvation by abolishing the law, or abrogating what the prophets had declared to be the will of God ; but he came to bring salvation to us notwithstanding our circumstances as subject to a law which condemned us ; he came to fulfil this law, to establish it. It was prophesied of him that he should “ magnify the law and make it honour-

able," (Isa. xlii. 21.) and he himself declared openly, and manifested in his life and death, that he came not to "destroy the law or the prophets," but "to fulfil." (Matt. v. 17.) Here, then, is a refuge for us; here we have sure ground whereon to build our hope of acceptance. Our surety claims in our behalf, as the reward due to his perfect obedience, exemption from all condemnation, and also exaltation to endless happiness.

If we wish to approach God according to the terms of the Old Covenant, that is, of a law holy, just, and good, we must come prepared to meet the sentence of that law; in it no provision is made for pardon to those who violate its precepts. Its terms are, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them;" (Gal. iii. 10.) so that to be under this law, as the rule by which our condemnation or our acquittal is to be decided, is in fact to be under the curse, inasmuch as no man can be found whose life will bear the scrutiny of every demand of the law. Moreover, condemnation by this law, as to the efficiency of the sentence, is not according to the number and extent of the violations, but falls on every one who has transgressed but one of its commands. The doctrine of Scripture on this subject is, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." (James ii. 10.) Now, Christ has proclaimed a New Cove-

nant; he has announced to us the "kingdom of God," which he himself has brought nigh unto us. He came to call "sinners to repentance;" (Matt. ix. 13.) to preach the Gospel of peace; to bring glad tidings of good things. The law and the prophets were until John, since that time the kingdom of God is preached. (Luke xvi. 16.) "The law was given by Moses," and was proclaimed with the terrors of thunder, lightning, and earthquake; "but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." (John i. 17.) The Gospel is a milder dispensation, announced by angels and a "multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men." (Luke ii. 14.) By the law, man was subject to "the spirit of bondage," but by the Gospel he receives "the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father." (Rom. viii. 15.) Christ has abolished the first covenant as faulty and imperfect, (Heb. viii. 7.) and has become "the mediator of a better covenant, established upon better promises." (Heb. viii. 6.) The commandment, that is, the law, is disannulled, "for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof; for the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God." (Heb. vii. 18, 19.) The first covenant was not intended to be permanent, but only an introduction to a more perfect dispensation under the Gospel, therefore those who cleave

to the old covenant, set themselves in opposition to the designs of God's grace, and reject the way of salvation which he has appointed. By the law we are assured that no flesh shall be justified; (Gal. ii. 16.) therefore whoever seeks access to God by the works of the law, sets himself against the promises of God, and walks in the road to despair and destruction. The introduction of a new dispensation shows that the former was inadequate to the purpose of justification; "for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law." (Gal. iii. 21.) The law was not originally given as a means of eternal life, but to convince man of sin, to show him the necessity of perfect obedience, and thereby to be as it were a "schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ;" (Gal. iii. 24.) in whom we might find hope, peace, liberty, and by whom we might "draw nigh unto God."

Again—If we will come to God on the ground of our own works, and find that we must come as sinners, it is necessary that we should bring with us some atonement for sin, something to make reparation of the law which we have broken. But how can we furnish this atonement ourselves, seeing perfect and unvarying obedience was always our duty: and no obedience, subsequent to sin, can make reparation of former transgressions. Our want of an atonement is the very point in the

distress of our circumstances, which precludes the possibility of its being furnished by ourselves. The absolute poverty of human nature, can never supply the inestimable sum required for our ransom. The guilty person cannot become an oblation to put away sin, because the victim demanded by divine justice must be spotless, pure, and undefiled. A sinner cannot pay the ransom necessary for his acquittal, because how is he first to be cleansed from his guilt, so as to be in a condition to have somewhat to offer; and if cleansed, there is no necessity for an offering. His case, then, is desperate without external aid; but this aid is found in the conditions of the New Covenant. "Christ is sacrificed for us;" (1 Cor. v. 7.) he is the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world;" (Rev. xiii. 8.) he "loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood," (Rev. i. 5.) having "given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God." (Eph. v. 2.) The condition of man was hopeless; no human aid could assist him; no angelic power was appointed to succour him; but "when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly, —while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. v. 6. 8.) This is the only atonement for sin that can find acceptance with God, and claim by its merit the pardon of a guilty world. The stain of sin is too deeply entered into the soul, to be effaced by any other means than the blood of

Christ. The indignity offered to God by transgression, could only be repaired by the sacrifice of Christ. The insult and contempt cast on God's authority, could only be obliterated by Christ's perfect obedience. The intervention of Christ on our behalf, is the sole ground of acceptance with God. This is the Scriptural statement respecting justification; and it is a more powerful consideration to influence our faith and conduct, than any attempt to explain how the act of justifying sinners, can be reconciled with the holiness and justice of God.

We possess the strongest assurance that the mediation of Christ is accepted with God, in the resurrection of our Lord from the dead. The establishment of this fact, (and, if there be such a thing as historical evidence, it is established to the full satisfaction of every honest inquirer,) forms the basis of Christian hope; it is the most important fact recorded in the New Testament, inasmuch as it confirms the validity of the mission of Jesus Christ, and proves the completion of the work of human redemption. Therefore it is said that Christ has been "raised again for our justification;" (Rom. iv. 25.) to prove to us that our redemption is perfected, and that we are thereby "begotten again unto a lively hope." (1 Pet. i. 3.) The hope of immortality which Adam lost by sin, is restored to us by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; and we can

now look forward with hope “to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away.” (1 Pet. i. 4.) And we know also that the work of redemption, which Christ effected so many ages ago, is still beneficial to the successive generations of mankind, “seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” (Heb. vii. 25.) Having fulfilled the will of his Father on earth, he now sitteth at the “right hand of the Majesty on high,” until the restitution of all things; but he is still our Advocate by appearing “in the presence of God for us;”—(Heb. ix. 24.)—not as the priests of old stood “daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins,” but by a perpetual presenting on our behalf the merits of that “one sacrifice for sins,” by which “he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” (Heb. x. 11—14.)

With some persons it is a question, whether the righteousness of Christ be indeed imputed to man; and they assert that it is no-where said in Scripture that it is so imputed. But although it be not so declared in express terms, yet it is affirmed in words of similar import. We know that the Scriptural expression respecting faith is, that it is “counted for righteousness.” (Rom. iv. 5.) But what is this faith which is so counted? It is a belief that Christ hath interposed as Mediator between God and Man; that he hath

borne the curse for us, and hath prepared for us a righteousness on the account of which alone we can be justified in the sight of God. And that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, is plainly set forth in many passages of Scripture, where it is called "the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all them that believe;" (Rom. iii. 22.) and Christ is said to have been made "sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." (2 Cor. v. 21.) St. Paul, who doubtless understood the mode of justification, as well as preached it, desired earnestly for himself that he might "be found in" Christ, not having his own righteousness, "but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." (Phil. iii. 9.) He evidently means the righteousness of Christ, which is imputed to us by God, being apprehended by us through faith.

With others it is a question, when this justification takes place, and whether it be irreversible; that is, when a man may be said to be in a justified state, and whether it be possible for him to lose the benefits of such a state.—It is of great importance that we have right notions on these points, because erroneous opinions here, will have an evil influence on our moral conduct. If men believe that their justification was positively and absolutely decreed from the commencement of the

covenant of grace, or that it takes place irrevocably in this life on believing, they will lose a strong inducement to holiness and a circumspect conversation; because no conduct on their part can set aside what God has finally established. But if they believe that their faith, if genuine, places them in a state of justification, being accepted of God to that effect—not of merit, but of his own free grace, and if persevered in, and proved to be of heavenly origin by producing good works, will certainly maintain them in a justified state, they will have a powerful motive to examine themselves daily whether they be in the faith; to prove themselves, (2 Cor. xiii. 5.) and to exercise a constant watchfulness over their heart and conduct. That justification takes place on believing, is evident from the case of Abraham, of whom it is said that he “believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.” (Rom. iv. 3.) We have no ground for supposing that he was in a justified state, previously to the exercise of this acceptable faith. Into the secret purpose of God we can make no inquiry; our duty is to attend to what he has been pleased to reveal. He has assured us that by faith we may apprehend all the benefits of Christ’s mediation; our duty naturally follows to believe on the Son of God.—We know that those who hold the doctrine of what they call eternal justification, maintain also the doctrine of final perseverance,

and the impossibility of believers' falling from grace once received. This latter resource, doubtless, meets the difficulty of the former point of doctrine ; but this is not a sufficient ground for its acceptance, for we are not to receive a doctrine because it corresponds with or supports another doctrine, but only because it is plainly declared in Scripture.

At to the possibility of losing the benefits of justification, after they have been once apprehended by faith, the many and solemn charges which are given us in God's word to " hold fast that which is good,"—(1. Thess. v. 21.) to " hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering ;" (Heb. x. 23.) and the warnings that " we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end ;" (Heb. iii. 14.) and the caution that we should " fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of us " should seem to come short of it ;" (Heb. iv. 1.) and the awful declaration that it is impossible to " renew again unto repentance those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost,—if they shall fall away," (Heb. vi. 4—6.) and that " if any man draw back," God will " have no pleasure in him ;"—(Heb. x. 38.) All these things prove that a man may

renounce his faith; otherwise, where is the benefit of these admonitions? And if he renounce his faith, he must fall from his justified state; otherwise, what is the meaning of those declarations where the alarming consequences of drawing back are pointed out? To what end is caution given, if there be no danger? What purpose is answered by stating the dreadful results of falling away, if faith cannot fail, and if justification be indefeisible? Instead, then, of saying 'The truth of God is pledged for the certain endurance of my faith, the purpose of God assures the perpetuity of my justified state;' let us rather examine ourselves, seeing the Scriptures speak of a faith which is dead, (Jam. iii. 17, et seq.) and of holding the "truth in unrighteousness." (Rom. i. 18.) The danger consists in substituting the knowledge of Scriptural doctrines, for the love and practice of them; and in mistaking the soundness of our belief, as to the objects of it, for the vital energy, the transforming and sanctifying efficacy of genuine Scriptural faith. God is the "justifier of him which believeth in Jesus;" (Rom. iii. 26.) that is, who continueth to believe in him; for we are of the household of Christ, "if we hold fast the confidence, and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end;" (Heb. iii. 6.) and "he that endureth to the end shall be saved." (Matt. x. 22.)

FAITH.

IN religion there are some things, which tending to edification, are therefore desirable in themselves as Christian attainments; but they are not so essential to the Christian character, that without them a man cannot be saved. And, again, there are some things which are explicitly declared in the Word of God to be of indispensable obligation, so that to be destitute of them, is to be in a state of alienation from God, without his favour or approbation, and without any well-grounded hope of eternal life. Among these latter must faith be classed, as we are assured by the divine Word that without faith it is impossible to please God, (Heb. xi. 6.) and that "he that believeth shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark xvi. 16.) If such be the importance and indispensable necessity of faith, it is an object well worthy of our most serious inquiry in what true faith consists, and what are the evidences of possessing it.

Why is faith stated to be so important and necessary to our salvation? Because man is unable to perform a meritorious obedience in order to procure pardon and justification, and to purchase a title to heaven; because salvation

through faith brings all the glory to God, and is the most powerful motive to holiness in man. Faith is indispensable, because God requires it of us, as the channel through which salvation is bestowed: but the necessity of faith does not proceed originally from the sovereign will of God only—merely because he would have it so; but from the circumstances of our lost condition, and the means which God has appointed for our redemption. God has fitted the means of redemption to the necessities of men, and our condition of guilt and helplessness rendered faith the best mode in which the blessings of salvation could be embraced by us.

There must be knowledge before there can be true faith. Ignorance of our true condition—of our guilt and necessities, is the foundation of unbelief. Before we can exercise faith, the whole object of faith must be laid before us; and made comprehensible to our understanding; at least so far, that nothing be proposed as an object of belief which is in itself contrary to reason. But mere knowledge is not sufficient, without a clear and strong conviction of the importance of the things proposed to our faith, their fitness and suitableness to our circumstances, and their being indispensably requisite to our welfare. Most men will affirm that they have faith in God, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and faith in the Scriptures. But their faith is nothing more than a

simple belief that God exists, and that he is the Creator and Preserver of all things,—that there is a Personage called Jesus Christ the Saviour, and that the Bible is an inspired book. Such a belief as this is wholly unoperative. It is a mere historical faith; and has no more influence over the mind and conduct than the belief of any other historical facts, relating to the men and things of this world. We act in all cases according to our belief; and therefore we may form a just opinion of a man's faith, by what we observe of his conduct. It is in vain that a man tells us he has faith in God, while his conduct contradicts his assertions—while there is a variance between his life and the genuine fruits of faith. Where the heart truly believes the important facts recorded in the Scriptures, and rightly receives the doctrines there stated, the conduct must be influenced accordingly. A mere belief of words and phrases is not faith. We may assent to all that the Bible contains; we may express our assent in the language of the best-composed creed; and yet be destitute of that deep conviction of the truth and meaning of what we affirm, which is essential to true faith. We may constantly use the most correct words and phrases, and yet have no correct idea of what they represent—nothing in our hearts that responds to the spirit and signification of them.—To say that we believe the Saviour's love, and our own unworthiness and inevitable ruin,

without the interposition of his love, is very different from feeling the value of that love, and having correct notions of the extent of our moral degradation as sinners. If we believe the Saviour's love, and exercise true faith in it, it will dwell much in our thoughts ; it will be an operative principle, softening and ameliorating the heart, sweetly constraining the will to holy obedience, sanctifying the affections, and assimilating the whole man to the divine image in which we were at first created.

Faith requires the combined exercise of the understanding and the affections. If we understand what the Word of God reveals to us of the misery and hopelessness of our condition as sinners, without the mercy of God ; and what it also reveals to us of the mercy and love and grace of God ; our affections will be excited, our judgment will not only assent to the important truths, but our hearts will receive them ; they will influence our hopes and our gratitude. Believing that God is infinite in power and in loving-kindness also, we shall be disposed to love him supremely ; and to put our trust in him, so as to obtain peace and joy unspeakable. Our conduct will also be influenced by our right knowledge and our true faith. We shall walk so as to please God. We may not in every distinct action of our lives, have a direct reference to the divine will and glory ; but the deep impression on our minds that such is our

duty, may bring us to the same holy habit in *effect*, although the principle be not always obviously and palpably brought forward to notice. Our moral character is formed by the habitual tendency of our affections; and this character manifests itself, even when the actual movement of the affections is not apparent. There is a plain, and undeniable, and undoubted effect of the habit, without an open display of the principle on which it is founded, and by which it is produced and governed.

Faith stands in the place of demonstration. It becomes to us an argument and proof of the existence of those things which are unseen, but which we hope for, and expect with full confidence. (Heb. xi. 1.—1 Pet. i. 8.) In the present state we cannot have evidence to our senses, of the existence of heaven and of hell; we cannot see God and live; (Exod. xxxiii. 20.) and “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” (1 Cor. xv. 50.) But we have such evidence of the truth of all these objects of belief, that faith in them is a rational exercise of our minds, and therefore becomes a duty.—A man may say, perhaps, ‘I cannot have faith; I have not control over my mind to believe or disbelieve what I please, and to the extent that I please.’ There may be this inability; but with respect to spiritual things—those things which concern the salvation of the soul, the inability is moral, and not na-

tural ; and therefore it carries culpability with it. God commands us to believe ; consequently faith is a duty which cannot be neglected without incurring sin. If we have not the power of believing, this is our sin. We were not created under a natural disability to believe, but sin has made us morally indisposed to do the will of God. We love evil rather than good ; and it is the indulgence of our evil propensities, that takes from us the power of exercising saving faith.

Hence arise some very important considerations:—that the bias of our minds—the main disposition of our hearts, forms the surest criterion whereby to judge of our spiritual character ; and that our ability or disability to believe the Gospel, when proposed to us—to believe it practically and savingly, depends upon the strengthening or the weakening of that evil principle which is natural to us, and which is only to be effectually restrained, controlled, and directed to a right end, by the aid of the Holy Spirit. But the Spirit's influence is not forced on men, whether they will or not. Men are not regarded in the Gospel Dispensation as stocks and stones, as mere inert bodies to be acted upon by irresistible grace. The Spirit of God operates on every heart ; but always agreeably to the constitution of our nature, always in perfect accordance with our condition as free agents. In those whose minds are much employed in meditating on heavenly truths, whose

faith leads them to a course of action which manifests the influence of Christian principles, the power of the Holy Spirit is most evidently displayed in assisting them to strive ever against the natural corruption of human nature. In such minds the power of the Divine Spirit is never vanquished, although often resisted and weakened. But in minds which are altogether occupied with earthly cares and pursuits, which are adverse to the admission and cherishing of any serious reflections, which are wholly led by the natural disposition of the depraved heart, and which always resist the influence of the Holy Spirit, there is no spiritual life found; they know not the Gospel, because they wish not to know it; they cannot believe, because they will not understand; they live without faith, and die without hope.

God is the author of faith, not only as the giver of that revelation which discovers to us the objects of faith; (Rom. x. 17.) but also as the bestower of the principle of faith. When revelation is presented to the natural man, he may not reject it as unworthy of belief; on the contrary he may receive it, and give full credence to it, and even become a strong advocate for its genuineness and authenticity; but he will not exercise saving faith in it, so as to search it with the anxious inquiry, "What shall I do to be saved?" he will not make it the rule of his life, the foundation of his hopes, the source of his consolations, until divine power open his

heart to receive it as the Word of God, and until divine grace make him thereby wise unto salvation. Faith is the channel appointed by God, through which to derive all the blessings of redemption. If we seek access to God, it must be by faith, which is called the "door" whereby sinners enter into the family and household of God. (Acts xiv. 27.) If we desire pardon, it must be by faith in Christ, "whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood." (Rom. iii. 25.) If we look for justification, it must be by faith, for "a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ." (Gal. ii. 16.) Do we wish for the peace and hope of the Gospel? They must be obtained by faith; "being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." (Rom. v. 1, 2.) Do we strive to persevere in our obedience to the Gospel of God? It must be done by faith; "the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God;" (Gal. ii. 20.) "being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ;" (Phil. i. 6.) "the just shall live by faith;" (Heb. x. 38.) and believers are said to be "kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation." (1 Pet. i. 5.) Finally—If we are

waiting for eternal life, it must be by faith ; and thus we shall receive the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls. (1 Pet. i. 9.)

We read in the Scriptures of " faith in God," (Mark xi. 22.) and of " faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." (Acts xx. 21.) To have faith in God, is to have faith in his being ; and this would naturally lead to faith in his perfections. A knowledge of the perfections of the Deity, prevents many errors into which men are apt to fall. When a man is convinced of his sin, and of the ruin which sin has brought on the human race, when he hears of there being forgiveness with God, he is naturally desirous of pardon, and begins to indulge the hope of obtaining it. But the magnitude of the blessing which he needs, often diverts him from inquiring whether he is seeking and expecting it in the right way. He is fearful of losing so desirable a blessing, or of having the hope of it at all weakened in his breast, so that having ascertained that God is merciful, he rests on the exercise of that attribute only ; and either cares not to make further inquiry into the other perfections of God, which must necessarily harmonize with his mercy, or fears that such an inquiry will end in disturbing his peace, and clouding his expectations. So that we often find persons who know no more of the divine character, than that God is merciful ; and resting all their dependence for pardon on the exercise of this single attribute,

they remain in ignorance of the grand peculiarities of the Gospel dispensation. Such persons cannot be said to have true faith in God.

Faith in God has respect to all his perfections ; and does not exalt one to the depreciation of another. We must expect salvation as the united effect of all God's perfections, in the most accordant harmony. And we should have an enlightened and intelligent trust in the Providence, as well as in the Grace of God. The latter more particularly regards us as sinners ; the former as dependent creatures. Faith in the Providence of God is a principle, which affords the mind real and abiding consolation ; and at the same time operates as a powerful stimulus to diligence. We do not rightly trust in God for subsistence, when we neglect the means which are given us to be employed with industry and perseverance. Presumptuous reliance on the goodness and care of God cannot be acceptable to him ; because it is contrary to the order which he has established on earth, and to the connexion which he has appointed between cause and effect. Those who rashly enter on danger, with the secret expectation that because God is almighty, his power will certainly be exercised in their preservation and deliverance, will often have cause to regret their presumption, and in the bitterness of suffering to lament their own sinful hardihood, which led them to tempt God, rather than to trust in him. Pru-

dence and forethought are qualities which have their value in the sight of God, however they may be despised by some persons ; and God will not, by what may be called a disorderly interposition of his Providence, show that these qualities can be neglected or despised with impunity. If we walk contrary to the order which God has appointed, we must expect to reap the fruits of our folly and our sin.

Faith in God is necessary to acceptable prayer. "How shall they call on him, in whom they have not believed?" (Rom. x. 14.) "He that cometh to God, must believe that he is; and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." (Heb. xi. 6.) The wavering man is warned not to "think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord." (James i. 6, 7.) Now, if we live in the practice of any known sin, we cannot approach God in prayer without doubting whether our prayer will be accepted; and this prevents our obtaining the blessing which we ask for. If we receive not an answer to prayer, the obstacle must lie with ourselves. God has promised to hear prayer: his promises are founded on eternal truth: he fulfils all that he has promised: thousands receive the spiritual blessings which they supplicate: if we do not receive them, it is either because we ask not, or because we ask amiss. (Jam. iv. 3.) It was chiefly with respect to prayer, that Christ said to his disciples, "Have faith in

God." We must believe that God is able and willing to perform what we desire ; the direction given by Christ on this point is, " What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." (Mark xi. 24.)

True faith in God also includes a well-grounded persuasion, that what we ask is agreeable to the will of God. We must not pray to God as we prefer our requests to each other, thinking that we can persuade our Maker to grant what we so vehemently wish : but we must ask only for such things as he has promised to bestow : or, if there be no express promise, we must ask in subjection to the divine will. The prayer of faith always partakes of that resigned spirit, so remarkable in our Lord's supplication previously to his suffering, " Not as I will, but as thou wilt." (Matt. xxvi. 39.)

Faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ is so connected with true faith in God, that they cannot be possessed separately and distinctly by those who are called Christians ; he that believes in God, has respect to his justice as well as his mercy, to his anger and threatenings against sin as well as to his willingness to forgive, to the means of salvation as well as to the God of salvation. Therefore he must have faith in Christ ; because it is only through his mediation that the justice of God is satisfied, and his mercy manifested ; that the divine anger is appeased, and the divine threaten-

ings averted ; that salvation is bestowed on any of the human race, and that men are sanctified and made partakers of this salvation.—The Scriptural answer to the sinner's inquiry, what he must do to be saved, is " Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." (Acts xvi. 31.) Faith in Christ includes a regard to all the offices which he sustains as our Redeemer, and to all that he has performed on our behalf.

There is a contradiction in the character of man, which discovers itself in the manner in which he too often receives the doctrine of salvation by a Mediator. If he feels his state to be such as to require the interposition of a more holy, and more wise, and more powerful being than himself ; yet he is disposed to look upon such an interposition as necessary only in part ; to make up some deficiencies of which he is conscious ; to modify the law of God, rather than to fulfil it perfectly on his account, and to establish it in all its penalties ; to render his allowed imperfect obedience available to the purchase of eternal life. In short, he desires a Saviour whose mediation is to take away the heinousness of sin, and render it less hateful in the sight of God ; to open a way to heaven, in which man may walk in the partial indulgence of his depraved appetites and passions, and yet not fail to arrive at the happiness of heaven.

But this is not a true knowledge of Christ ; and cannot, therefore, lead to true faith in him.

Jesus Christ is a Saviour to the uttermost. The right knowledge of the Gospel, and true faith in Christ, lead not to slight notions of sin, but to more enlarged acquaintance with its guilt and exceeding vileness; they will not induce low thoughts of the holiness of God, but a more exalted opinion respecting his purity, and justice, and truth: they will not dispose us to regard ourselves with complacency as but trifling offenders, nor to call our aggravated and innumerable transgressions by the soft names of failings and infirmities; but to have the most humbling views of our own character, to abhor ourselves, “and repent in dust and ashes.” (Job xlii. 6.)

True faith in Christ reposes on the perfection of his mediation.—If man had continued in his original uprightness, there would not have been a necessity of appointing a Mediator between God and him; because access to God was ever open to innocence. Before Adam knew sin, he held immediate intercourse with his Maker; his soul could appear without the terror of condemnation before the holy God; his eyes could look on heavenly beings without dismay, for his purity, though in a lower sphere, was spotless as theirs. The throne of God had not yet become the Judgment-seat; nor his law a condemning sentence; nor his service a yoke and burden. But sin having entered, direct access to God was cut off; it became necessary, therefore, that a Mediator

should be constituted between God and man, through whom God might be merciful, and man might be saved; through whom repentance might be accepted, and pardon dispensed.

If the effects of sin were suffered to fall on us to the utmost, we should be given up to the fury of the elements, to the rage of fierce and ravenous animals, to diseases of every name and form, to the full control of the depraved passions of the heart, to the horrors of a guilty and tormenting conscience,—for all these enemies hath sin armed against us. And in the world to come, death would reign over us by confining our bodies to the grave, and imprisoning our souls in the dark abodes of despair. By sin we have renounced the providence and favour of God, and have no claim on his love and mercy: we have no right to life itself, nor to any of its enjoyments. We must come to God to receive every blessing as purchased for us by a Mediator. Grace must save us. We must have an Advocate to plead our cause with God; that those blessings and comforts connected with our original condition, and indispensable to our well-being, may be continued to us in our fallen estate; and that the richer blessings of salvation may be freely imparted to us. Such an Advocate is provided for us in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is “able to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God

by him ; seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." (Heb. vii. 25.)

We must have faith in the intercession of Christ on our behalf, as well as in the other branches of his meditorial office. The intercessory office of Christ seems not to be regarded with sufficient notice by many Christians, nor made an object of faith so much as it ought to be. The whole meditorial work of our Lord is the ground of a sinner's acceptance with God, and our faith should be directed towards it as such ; but we should be careful at the same time not to overlook an important part of it—the intercessory office of Christ, now exercised in heaven for us.—The great gift to men under the Gospel is the influence of the Holy Spirit. This gift is bestowed upon us as the especial fruit of Christ's mediation ; agreeably to the promise of our Lord, " I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever ; even the Spirit of truth." " The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things." (John xiv. 16, 26.)

As under the former dispensation, the incense and the evening sacrifice ascended to God daily, as an offering acceptable to him ; so the merits of Christ's mediation are constantly brought in remembrance before the throne of God, by him

who pleads our cause in heaven. The atonement for sin, made once for all by Christ, when he shed his precious blood on the cross, is constantly presented to God on behalf of us, and is thus made efficacious to procure the pardon of our daily trespasses. By the constant effusion of the Holy Spirit, men are daily renewed to repentance; and by the constant intercession of Jesus, they are maintained in a state of acceptance with God. Thus the atonement made by Christ on earth, delivered them from the state of condemnation into which they had fallen through sin; and his intercessory office in heaven preserves them from again falling into that state. By the former they were redeemed; by the latter they are upheld, By the one they were raised to a state of acceptance with God; and by the other they are maintained in that state.

True faith varies in degree in different persons; but not in nature and kind. There may be true faith, where the principle of faith is but weak. Some persons possess genuine faith, who are nevertheless much subject to trouble and inquietude because of doubts and fears. Others are "strong in faith, giving glory to God," (Rom. iv. 20.) and attain to assurance. Many persons ridicule the idea of its being possible to attain to an assurance of salvation in the present state. But, not to insist on the sanction which the Word of God gives to such an attainment, we

may ask the opponents whether they do not hold it to be perfectly rational, to feel assured of that of which they have good and undoubted evidence. The salvation of sinners by Christ is an indisputable fact ; the evidences of being interested in this salvation are distinctly stated in the Scriptures ; and this salvation is designed to promote present comfort, as well as to give a title to future and everlasting enjoyment. Surely it is no small portion of comfort to attain to a reasonable hope that we are interested in this salvation, and shall enjoy its endless blessings in heaven. Such a hope is always founded on a rational and intelligent trust in the Redeemer ; and differs widely from mere presumptuous confidence. If assurance were a figment of the imagination, or the mere offspring of fancy, it would be deservedly classed among those fanatical errors, which are grounded only on unaccountable feelings and persuasions of the mind. But if it proceed from a diligent and impartial investigation of the state of our hearts and conduct, and a careful comparison of these with the requirements of God's word,—and if it be the result also of a calm and deliberate inquiry, whether we possess the marks of being in a state of justification, let us never be induced to renounce it at the call of cold-hearted indifference, or dull formality. True religion was designed for the affections as well as the judgment ; for the heart as well as the understanding. bro W

It is not intended to affirm that this assurance is uninterrupted in any one ; it will vary according to the strength of a man's faith, and according to the consistency of a man's conduct. When St. Peter saw his Master walking on the sea, by a sudden but uncalled-for effort of faith, he said, " Bid me come unto thee on the water : " but when he was come down out of the ship, and " saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid ; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying ; Lord, save me." (Matt. xiv. 28—30.) All that we wish to prove respecting assurance is, that it is attainable, and that it is both reasonable and Scriptural. It is never rightly attained, unless there be a conversation and conduct becoming the Gospel. Some persons boast of their assurance, whose life shows that their hope is but presumption, and their faith self-deception. They will not allow faith to be true and genuine, unless it is also accompanied by assurance—by a full and uninterrupted assurance of salvation, irrespective of self-examination, and the possession of Scriptural marks and evidences of Christian character.

There must be, doubtless, some degree of assurance in true faith, or the principle of faith could not be kept alive in the heart. If we cannot trust in what we believe, our faith is of little avail to us. As faith is an act of the mind ; so trust is an act of faith. If we believe in God, this is faith ; if we rely on his Providence and

Grace, this is trust. If we believe in Jesus Christ as the Saviour, this is faith; if we look to him and depend upon him for our own salvation, this is trust.—We shall find on inquiry, that much of the religion of many persons consists in the simple exercise of faith. They have no doubt of the being of God, but they have very little reliance on his Providence and Grace; they doubt not either the power or the willingness of the Saviour to receive all that come unto him, but they seldom act upon this belief, so as to trust in him for their own personal safety—so as to enjoy present peace and satisfaction. Their religion consists chiefly in an act of the judgment. They read the Scriptures, and see how the grace of God hath appeared unto all men; they understand the declaration, and are convinced of its truth, that it “is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners;” (1 Tim. i. 15.) but such a belief is nearly powerless with them, as to any good effects; it exercises but small influence over their tempers and conduct, to rectify and sanctify them. And when sudden trouble comes, then come also fear and perplexity; their minds are so confused as often to be unable even to contemplate the way of salvation, much less to find in it a place of refuge and sure defence. Their want of comfort proceeds from the want of a sincere and intire reception of the Gospel. They understand

it, but do not admit it to reign in their hearts ; they profess it, but do not sufficiently practise it.

We hear also complaints of the want of faith from many persons, of whose sincerity there can be no doubt. But if we examine the grounds of their doubts and fears, we shall find that by want of faith they mean want of assurance—want of an abiding persuasion that they shall infallibly be saved. They mistake the nature of assurance, and are seeking a state of mind in which faith may be dispensed with ; forgetful that by faith a man must live, till he has finished his earthly course. They do not sufficiently connect cause and effect ; they either have not a correct acquaintance with the Gospel, and so their doubts and fears proceed from ignorance ; or their constitutional temperament forbids their deriving all the hope and consolation, which a sincere reception of the Gospel is calculated to impart. Their religion partakes largely of gloom and melancholy ; they speak of God only as a Sovereign, whose will is not to be disputed, who has a right to do as he pleases ; and this is the only principle that keeps them from murmuring, and that sustains their mind under afflictions. They do not look on God so much as a Father, as a Master ; and think more of his power than his love.

Let not such persons unnecessarily distress their minds with fears, lest they do not truly believe in God,—with doubts, lest they should finally fall

short of the promised inheritance ; but let them rather seek to understand more clearly the nature of the Gospel ; let them pray earnestly to God, that they may have a more intelligent faith, and may rely more fully for pardon on the blood of Christ ; that they may find his atonement not only such a title to heaven, as will fill their breasts with the desire, but their minds also with the comfortable expectation of it. Let them call on that God, who knows how often the infirmities of the body oppress and weigh down the mind, that he would grant them such a divine principle, as may rise superior to all injurious depressions, proceeding from the weakness of their nature ; that he would make their hearts right, and keep their spirits steadfast in his covenant of peace ; that they may be “ strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in” their “ hearts by faith,” (Eph. iii. 16, 17.) and they may be thereby established, strengthened, settled in the knowledge and hope of the Gospel. (1 Pet. v. 10.) “Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.” (Psalm ii. 12.)

KNOWLEDGE AND HOPE OF THE GOSPEL.

EVERY man who believes that there is a God, and that himself is a sinner, and who meditates with seriousness on these two truths, cannot avoid being anxious to know whether the state of his mind and the conduct which he is pursuing, are pleasing or displeasing in the sight of God. Much of our present comfort, therefore, and our intire future happiness, depend upon the conclusion to which a conscientious inquiry, aided by the Word of God, may be brought in considering this important question. The conviction that we are sinners is sufficient to fill us with fear and apprehension, when we reflect on the nature of God's law, as revealed to us in his Word, and on the nature and perfections of God himself.—Under such circumstances, what system of human invention, what theory of philosophy can give us any consolation—any hope? Mere conjecture, the remedies suggested by a terrified imagination, or the rites commanded by superstition, cannot convey peace to the troubled mind. A mind alive to the evil and consequences of sin, is quick at discerning the poverty of all

human resources, and refuses to lean on the broken reed of human merit. There is a spirituality so essentially requisite in the means of delivering man from his fallen estate, that the heart which feels the extent of the degradation caused by sin, and the distance to which sin has banished man from God, feels a secret misgiving when presented with any ground for reliance which is destitute of divine authority. So evident is it that God alone, from whom we have departed, can devise the means of our restoration. The Gospel alone can meet our case, and show us how even sinners may be pardoned and saved.— We cannot approach God with safety as sinners, without the means of pardon and reconciliation ; nor can we come to him as righteous persons by our own merit. We may repent of our sins when we apprehend the painful consequences, as is commonly the case with offenders when punishment is at hand ; but, independent of the Gospel, how do we know that our repentance will avail, or be accepted as preparatory to pardon ? The same uncertainty prevails with respect to any internal feeling of our minds, as efficacious to procure our acceptance with God, as prevails in regard to any outward mode of sacrifices or of penance, suggested by mere human wisdom. In a case of so great moment, uncertainty takes away the intire value of the means that are employed ; the mind looks for a sure resting-place ; it cannot

be at ease till certainty is stamped on the mode in which peace is sought. And where can certainty be found but in God, and in what proceeds from him? Here, then, the Gospel, which is of divine origin, comes in to meet the case fully; it points to the Lamb of God as the ransom for sin, to the righteousness of God as the ground of our justification, and to the Spirit of God as the great agent in enlightening the mind, renewing the heart, sanctifying the affections, and preparing the soul for the enjoyment of the heavenly felicity.

When St. Paul wrote that exalted sentiment of a firm and decided mind—"I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth"—(Rom. i. 16.) he had endured, in consequence of his adherence to the Gospel, as much persecution, and derision, and actual suffering, as would have shaken the resolution of any man, whose faith was not established and settled, by the deepest and the best-grounded conviction of the truth of the cause in which he was engaged. Those who rejected the Gospel as a "cunningly-devised fable," mocked and scoffed at him as a wild enthusiast, as a man destitute of understanding, who could persevere in preaching a faith which not only did not bring temporal wealth and ease to its followers, but subjected them to much and continued suffering, and held out no advantage but a future and unseen reward. By the Jews the disciples of

Christ were hated as well as insulted, because they declared to the world that the Saviour and Prince, whom the nation of Israel had so long expected, and of whose coming they entertained the highest expectations, as their appointed deliverer from temporal bondage and thralldom, and who was to lead them forth as conquerors and masters of the world,—that this personage was Jesus Christ, who had been crucified. The anger of the Jews against Christ was caused by his lowly appearance in the world; they could not endure that one who had been born of humble parentage, who was a “man of sorrows,” in extreme poverty, and of mean appearance, should pretend to be their Messiah;* they were anxious,

* It seems to be a point taken for granted, by most persons, that the “bodily presence” of our Lord was highly majestic, and that his countenance bore the striking marks of divinity and humanity combined. At least this is a point which the Author has never heard to be controverted; and those painters are reckoned to succeed best, who are able to express in their portraits of Jesus, a happy combination of dignity and compassion, of majestic awe and mildness. That these qualities were united in the character of our Lord, when he appeared in the form of man, no Christian will for a moment deny; but may we not suppose, from what may be gathered from the Scripture testimony to the Messiah, that the outward personal appearance of Christ was wholly devoid of what we call a manly form, a noble aspect, and perfect regularity of feature? The state of the incarnate Saviour was one of humiliation and lowliness, not only in the circumstances of birth and fortune,

to show to all the world that they rejected such a character with shame and abhorrence ; and therefore they ardently sought his death, and that too

but also of personal comeliness. The Jews might, and probably did expect a Messiah of kingly appearance, of regal front, as well as of imperial splendour and power : but it was prophesied of the true Messiah, that many should be astonished at him on account of his “visage” being “marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men,”—that he should have “no form nor comeliness—no beauty that we should desire him,” (Isa. lii. 14.—liii. 2.)

Our Lord came not according to the wisdom of the flesh, in a form which would cause men to have his person in admiration ; it was a part of his mediatory office to be “despised and rejected of men,” who should hide as it were their faces from him, in contempt of his outward appearance.—The New Testament is intirely silent respecting the bodily form and feature of the Redeemer. The expression in Luke ii. 52. that “Jesus increased in stature,” being applicable only to his childhood, does not convey any meaning, from which might be inferred that there was any characteristic beauty or dignified gracefulness in the person of our Lord. The literal interpretation of the above prophecy of Isaiah, is sanctioned by the recorded fact, that after our Lord had arisen from the dead, (and certainly with the same body in which he had sojourned with his disciples,) and had appeared to Mary Magdalene, to whom his personal appearance must have been quite familiar, so little was there in his countenance or form, to distinguish him eminently from other men, that Mary did not at first recognise her Lord, but supposed him to be the gardener.” (John xx. 1—15.) It may be said that the sudden, and unexpected appearance of Christ, whom Mary supposed to be still numbered among the dead, would at first prevent her from recollecting so perfectly

in the most ignominious mode.—By the Gentiles also the servants of Christ were despised, as weak and credulous adherents to the doctrines of a man who had perished like a slave: they entertained the lowest opinion of men who could traverse the earth to promulgate a religion, whose founder had died on the cross. The Apostle Paul states in the most forcible manner, the treatment which they had to encounter, and the contempt which was cast upon them. He says of himself and of his fellow-labourers in preaching the Gospel, “we are buffeted, reviled, persecuted, defamed, made as the filth of the earth and the off-scouring of all things.” (1 Cor. iv. 11—13.) But, notwithstanding all these trials, he could say with confidence and with rejoicing, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.”

We do not honour the Gospel when we hesi-

the form and features of the Saviour, as to acknowledge at once his resurrection to life; but had there been any striking grandeur of countenance, or majesty of appearance, she could not have mistaken him for one in the mean situation of a servant. There does not seem to be any ground for supposing that her “eyes were holden,” as was the case with the two disciples with whom Jesus walked and conversed after his resurrection. (Luke xxiv. 13—31.) In the latter case, our Lord evidently designed to make trial of their faith, and therefore they were supernaturally prevented from knowing him; but not so in the case of Mary, who recognised Jesus on his speaking the second time.

tate to receive it intirely in all its peculiar doctrines, to rest upon it wholly as the foundation of our hopes and expectations. We may be said to be ashamed of the Gospel, when we seek to add our own supposed merits to the provision made in the Gospel for our redemption. It is a peculiar feature in the Gospel, that while it sanctions the observance of the moral law, it requires as indispensable to salvation, an intire and simple reliance on the mediation of Christ by faith, without any regard to our own righteousness as procuring for us in any degree the favour and acceptance of God.—Man was originally created upright ; and while he so continued, his own righteousness was a sufficient ground to expect a continuance of God's approbation and blessing. But when he became a sinner, the first ground of acceptance with God was altogether lost, and he became alienated, and an enemy to God in his mind by wicked works. His condition was then one which required some means of reconciliation, and these means could not be furnished by himself; he must receive them as a free gift. Accordingly the Gospel of Christ supplies a remedy exactly suited to his condition ; but man is not naturally disposed to submit to its terms of reconciliation ; he is in some degree ashamed of these terms, because they are humiliating when considered in connection with his original state, the remembrance of which is converted by his

depravity into pride, instead of being in itself a good preparative to receive with lowly thankfulness, any offer by which he may be restored to the favour of God. The Gospel is designed to bring salvation to man; but all the honour is intended to redound "to the praise of the glory of his grace," by whom the salvation is freely given. It detracts from the glory of this grace, when we act as though it were merely designed to make up our deficiencies, instead of being appointed to recover us from utter ruin. So far as we rely on our own works as meritorious, so far we renounce the Gospel, and are virtually ashamed of it as a sufficient ground for our whole and exclusive reliance. A partial trust in the Gospel excludes from all benefit in the Gospel; because its blessings are prepared only for those who receive it fully, and renounce all other means of being re-established in the favour of God. To such hesitating disciples, who are halting between two opinions, Christ declares, "whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the Holy Angels." (Luke ix. 26.)

We may be said to be ashamed of the Gospel, when we hesitate on proper occasions, to avow a proper regard to the precepts of the Gospel;—when from dread of the world's laugh, we comply

with customs and manners which are at variance with the spirit of the Gospel, if not with its positive commands. How conspicuously are the folly and depravity of man seen in such cases! He is proud of imitating his fellow creatures, but either dislikes, or feels a degree of shame to be conformed to the likeness of his Maker! He will submit without a murmur to the regulations of the rank in society in which he moves, although such regulations are established wholly irrespective of the divine will; but he feels a repugnance to conform to the conduct enjoined by his divine Lord and Master! Whose heart is intirely free from a consciousness of having, in some instances, yielded to the example of others, while that example was known to be in opposition to what we believed to be the example of Christ, which alone we are bound as Christians to follow? When we see the majority acting quite contrary to what the Bible approves and commands, we are exposed to the temptation of feeling ashamed to avow as Christians those principles, which, if followed up, would lead us to a conduct totally the reverse of what is passing before us, and in which we are solicited to join. The command "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil," (Exod. xxiii. 2.) is not without its application to the conduct which we are now considering. Men find a countenance in each other's society, for the misconduct which is common to all; and

singularity, even in obedience to God's will, is looked upon with some degree of dislike and shame. But where the spirit of the Gospel is admitted to reign in the heart, the conduct which the Gospel enjoins, how contrary soever to the opinions and maxims of the world, will be always studied with carefulness and pursued with diligence. The displeasure of God should be a more powerful inducement to "walk worthy of God unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God," (Col. i. 10.) than the dread of the censure or contempt of the world should be to prevail upon us to "walk after the flesh."

We are forbidden to display our religious duties unnecessarily ; but this is one extreme, and being ashamed of discharging them is another : both are equally opposed to the true spirit of the Gospel. The sincere and spiritually-minded Christian adopts the middle course ; he retires to his chamber, and in secret calls upon his God, being satisfied that his Maker alone should be the witness of his devotions. But when properly called upon to make a stand against irreligious practices, he is not ashamed to declare his allegiance to the King of heaven ; he believes that his principles have Scriptural authority for their sanction, and he is ever ready to act according to them, and to "give an answer to every man that asketh a reason of the hope that is in" him.

(1 Pet. iii. 15.) But many Christians who, while under the influence of that fear of man which “bringeth a snare,” (Prov. xxix. 25.) would blush to be discovered on their knees holding communion with the Father of their spirits, would feel elated on being seen to converse familiarly with the great men of the earth. Many feel a pride in being esteemed well-informed in the political relations of their country, who would feel some degree of shame at being supposed to be diligent readers of their Bible. The meekness and humility of the Christian are despised, when contrasted with what is called the becoming pride of the man of spirit—the man of the world, who will brook no insult, nor suffer any injury to pass unrevenged.—The command of the Gospel to us is, “Be not conformed to this world? but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.” (Rom xii. 2.) Here is a command which, if strictly obeyed, would prevent that deceit of the heart, by which we are too often led to suppose that our sincerity towards God may be preserved untarnished, even while we comply in some unlawful things, so that we do but retain correct sentiments in religion, and do not give up any point of doctrine in theory, although we may in practice go in a direction contrary to the tendency of true doctrine.

Again—We may be said to be ashamed of the Gospel, when we distrust the promises of God made to us, with respect to a supply of all needful temporal good ;—when we turn to expedients of our own invention in times of distress, instead of waiting for the blessing of God on the known path of duty. There is often a secret mixture of pride in our motives, when we are hurrying from one means to another in order to extricate ourselves from present difficulties. We do not like the way which appears to be marked out by God, because it calls for some sacrifice of appearance on our part, and will tend to humble us in the sight of others. We wish too much for a dispensation of Providence, that shall not thwart our inclinations ; but God in the guidance of our affairs, does not regulate events so much with a regard to our feelings, (which are too often at variance with the spirit of the Scriptures,) as to what ought to be our character as Christians. What we call *feeling*, in such cases, is generally pride struggling with a principle of duty ; and one evident design of God's government is to mortify and subdue “ every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God,” and to bring “ into captivity every thought, to the obedience of Christ.” (2 Cor. ii. 5.) The Gospel is accommodated to us as human beings, as frail, sinful, dependent ; but not to our depravity to afford it any encouragement, nor to our

weakness to confirm it ; it is intended to furnish us with the means of resisting the one, and of being delivered from the ill consequences of the other. The great design of God is to bring our minds to the standard, which the Gospel sets up as the only true measure of spiritual attainment ; and not to lower the Gospel standard to our estimate of what is proper to be done, or what it may please us to do.

As God is the author of our being, he alone knows what is best for us ; and as he is the giver of eternal life, he alone knows what is most adapted to promote our fitness for the enjoyment of that most excellent gift. He does not call men to make vows of continual poverty, or to renounce the comforts of life which his goodness has placed within their reach ; nor does he, on the other hand, so far remove all trials and difficulties, as to render this life no longer a state of probation. His wisdom and abundant loving-kindness have adapted the events of man's life, to the strength imparted to man, or promised to those that seek it by earnest prayer. Our duty is to " seek *first*, the kingdom of God and his righteousness," as our chief concern—as the great object which should engage our highest thoughts, our most undivided energies, and the best affections of our hearts. And that we may perform this duty without any distracting care and anxiety, proceeding from a fear of being destitute of the

things necessary to the support of this life, we have the assurance that "all these things shall be added" unto us; that is, all things needful and requisite for us, not according to our own desires, or what we may judge necessary to our comfort and subsistence, but according to what God sees most fitted to conduce to our temporal good, as subservient to the more important interests of our souls. "Having food and raiment," we are called upon to be "therewith content." We have the faithfulness and mercy of God whereon to rely: he is neither unmindful of us, nor uninformed of our wants; he careth for the fowls of the air, and the grass of the field, how much more then will he care for us his reasonable creatures. On these accounts it was that our Saviour encouraged, while he commanded his disciples, saying, "Take no (*anxious*) thought, saying, What shall we eat? or What shall we drink? or Wherewithal shall we be clothed? for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." (Matt. vi. 26—32.)

We have the most sure ground for confidence in the Gospel of Christ, because, "it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth." It is the power of God, because his power is eminently manifested in the plan of human redemption, which the Gospel fully unfolds and declares to us. Christ is said to be the "Power of God;" that is, the salvation of which

he is the author, is the most striking display of divine power, that has ever been exhibited to mankind. From the nature of God as revealed to us in his Word, from a knowledge of his inflexible truth and justice, we may infer that the redemption of the world was a greater exertion of divine power, than the creation of the world. In the latter instance, he commanded into existence matter which before had no being, and he fashioned into perfect forms the unresisting elements; but in the former case, he has shown himself able to reconcile the irreversible sentence of justice, and the unalterable decree of truth, with the exercise of unlimited mercy on those guilty beings who were condemned by both.—If we were not informed of the Truth and Justice of God, we might nevertheless very reasonably conclude that the salvation of man was insuperable to any created intelligence, because the arm of God alone has effected it; agreeably to what we read in the prophetic books, “He saw that there was no man, therefore his arm brought salvation unto him.” (Isa. lix. 16.) God does nothing in vain; every exercise of his power is prompted by boundless mercy, and guided by infinite wisdom. In the origin of the Gospel, then, as well as in its nature and its application, we have the best—the strongest ground of confidence, and may without fear adopt the declaration of the Apostle,

and say, We are not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the Power of God.

The power of God is continued to be displayed, in the application of the benefits of the Gospel to men. These benefits are the renewal of the heart, the sanctifying of the intire man, the gifts of faith, hope, and love, and the maintenance of these fruits of the divine Spirit; all which is effected alone by the Power of God.—The enemies of man are classed in Scripture under three heads, the World, the Flesh, and the Devil; these are incessant hinderances in the way of man's redemption: the snares and enticements of the world, the depravity and corruption of the heart, and the malice of Satan are in constant operation to sink men into perdition. What strength have we of our own to resist these enemies? We bear about in us “an evil heart of unbelief,” the temptations of the world are pleasing to our natural depravity, and we are willingly led captive by the wiles of our spiritual adversary. The power of God alone can help us; and this power is manifested in all those that believe. The Spirit of God is given to all who do not refuse and resist his holy influence; and thus feeble and sinful man is enabled to overcome every thing that opposes his salvation. Through life we are dependent upon this power; were it withdrawn for any period, we must fall into hopeless ruin

beneath the feet of our mighty adversaries. Its operation is manifested in the renovation of the heart, at the commencement of the divine life in the soul of man ; it continues to be shown in the good fight of faith, which the Christian warrior maintains through his whole life ; and it will be visible in its most conspicuous and most interesting display, when the palm of victory and the crown of glory shall be delivered to all them that believe.

It is not sufficient to acknowledge the Gospel as the power of God, we must have a practical acquaintance with it in that character. It is only those that feel themselves to be weak and depraved, who know the value of divine assistance and influence. The Gospel is the power of God to them only that believe. Faith introduces us to the knowledge of our condition as sinners, and it also shows us the complete provision, which is made in the Gospel to meet our every want. Christians are " kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation." (1 Pet. i. 5.) Without faith in the Gospel, we cannot attain to the hope of the Gospel. Without faith we cannot obtain any of the blessings of the Gospel ; and even with it, through our infirmity, we are often deprived of the strength and consolation which would otherwise attend us through life. We too often look to an arm of flesh ; and thus when affliction comes, we are troubled and dis-

mayed. The power of God is discerned in the support which it gives in afflictions, to all who rely upon it for assistance. When we enjoy the support of this power, we are so persuaded that whatever trials or sufferings come to us from God are not only right and just, but also the effect of divine mercy and goodness to our souls, that we are constrained to be quiet under the hand of God, and to wait for his salvation.

But the support of the Gospel, as the Power of God, is not confined to life and its trials; it is abundantly imparted to believers at the hour of death. At that time of great trial, those who trust in the Gospel will find it a sure support. Whatever cannot bear this touchstone, whatever will fail as a support when we come to examine and try it in the near view of eternity, is a false resting-place; it is unworthy of any reliance. The triumph of the Gospel is the full consolation which it imparts to the dying believer, and the strong support which it gives to his surviving friends. When we stand by the bed of the departing Christian, and see him on the verge of time, just leaving this state of being, we are like men on the shore of the mighty ocean, watching the departure of a vessel which is fast sailing to an unknown land. The observers perceive it receding from their view, till at length it is hidden from sight by the horizon closing on the vast expanse. They ask of the billows that follow in

endless succession, 'What lieth beyond?' But no answer is returned; wave succeeds to wave, but no tidings arrive from the far-distant shore. We ourselves must follow the track of those that have gone before us; we must see for ourselves what lieth on the other side of the now impenetrable cloud, that hangs over the secrets of eternity. But faith looks beyond the grave: hope realizes to us the glorious prospects which yet lie hid in eternity: although we see not the "honour and glory," which shall be manifested "at the appearing of Jesus Christ;" yet we love him, and, believing, we "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." (1 Pet. i. 7, 8.) If we draw back from this faith, our hope must also fail, and God will have no pleasure in us: but if we "continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel," (Col. i. 23.) we shall receive the end of our faith, "even the salvation of our souls;" (1 Pet. i. 9.) for the Gospel of Christ is "the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth."

DANGER OF HARDENED IMPENITENCE.

THE human mind is so constituted, that it can receive a decided bias by the force of repeated impressions ; and this bias being confirmed by habit, acquires at length the same efficiency as the original and natural principles of the mind. The force of habit has been ever understood as forming a kind of second nature. Instinct is the efficient cause of action in our natural passions ; and desire, the result of long continued custom, actuates our acquired habits. In the former case, a want of power to obey the actuating principle, is felt as a restraint upon our natural freedom ; in the latter case it is felt as a privation. In natural things, we use our faculties in obedience to a secret, original impulse, attended also with pleasure ; in habits, we use them as procuring new pleasures, as affording a new kind of gratification. In some instances the force of habit is found to surpass that of nature ; men will suffer bodily injury rather than the deprivation of some acquired habit ; nay, examples are not wanting in which they will risk the safety of their health and their lives, in the gratification of their habits. How many sink into utter ruin, both in regard to

the health of their bodies, and the state of their property, from a depraved attachment to strong liquors ! In short, every vice and every folly has its votaries, who are as abandoned to these unlawful or imprudent pursuits, as if they were originally created for this very purpose, and were born under an irresistible decree, and a powerful natural bias, to surrender all their faculties to the single influence of these destructive objects. How shall we account for the force of such habits—for such they are ! No man, certainly, is born under a fatality to seek, and at length procure his own ruin. One man may naturally have a greater constitutional *fitness* than another, for any particular pursuit ; but if the pursuit be unlawful or injurious, he is drawn to it only by the force of temptation, heightened, indeed, by the peculiarity of his natural temperament ; but it is, after all, only by the force of temptation that he is assailed, and he is under no destiny which unavoidably impels him forward to ruin ; he *may*, he *can* resist ; and if he yields, he is conscious that in so doing, he acts with perfect freedom ; his sin is voluntary, and this constitutes his guilt ; it is perpetrated with the consent of his will, and therefore he is justly exposed to the consequences of his course of life.—How, then, shall we account for these things ? and why should not the power of good habits, be at least equal to that of bad habits ? It seems that the mind

of man is formed with a capacity to acquire new rules of action, as well as new ideas ; new impulses, as well as new sentiments. These having all the freshness of novelty, as well as bringing with them a new source of pleasure, do take that place in the mind, which was at first occupied only by purely natural impulses and rules of action ; and being thus ranked among the principles of our nature, as to their influence in guiding and impelling men, they bring with them also those means of increasing our gratifications, which add to the influence of principle that of appetite ; and they are thus equal, and in some cases, superior, in power, to those appetites and passions, which are strictly natural. We find acquired evil habits able to resist the strength of reason, and to beat down every restraint of morality and religion ; while acquired good habits are but just able to maintain their ground, and do this by force of constant recurrence to the sanctions of religion, and by unremitted watchfulness. We may account for this, perhaps, by considering that, in the former case, the depraved nature of man, which has lost its primitive uprightness and holiness, falls in with every evil habit, and so adds to its strength ; but in the latter case, the very existence of the good habit is produced by the power and help of God, imparting to us a new, and holy principle ; and the continuance of the good habit is maintained by struggling against

the evil of the heart and the force of evil example, by reliance on divine assistance, and by a diligent improvement of all the means which tend to nourish us in godliness.

If such be the case, how important is it to acquire good habits in early life, as well as to watch against the encroachments of evil habits, because the mind is not only more impressible in youth, but also more retentive of the impressions which it receives. And every evil habit that is admitted, not only occupies the mind to a certain extent, but indisposes it to the reception of good habits; for as in the body, every wound inflicted while the humours are corrupted and inflamed, is not only more virulent in itself, but also tends to aggravate the disposition to sickness and disease; so in the mind which is naturally depraved and corrupt, and without moral health, every vice that is encouraged, increases the depravity, as well as finds polluted nourishment for its own deformed growth. As the practice of evil increases, the love of it strengthens; and at the same time the heart is hardened against reproof, and removed further and further from that state which is friendly to repentance and amendment. Every step taken in the forbidden paths of sin, leads the soul further from God, and weakens the power of returning to him; till at length that which was a resolution of reform, weak indeed, and deferred from time to time, becomes only a

transitory and scarcely perceptible uneasiness, and in the end a total indifference. The conscience, wounded by so many and oft-repeated offences, becomes a feeble monitor ; and at length is seared and callous. The mercy of God, so long despised and contemned, is succeeded by Justice ; and the impenitent sinner is delivered over to the full hardness of his heart, and sins without compunction, and without remorse, till he sinks into that gulf of perdition where remorse adds to the torment, and repentance is unavailing. O dreadful state, to reflect *then* only, when the door of return is irrevocably shut,—to begin to mourn for sin, when sorrow must be endless, and suffering interminable,—to begin to cry for mercy, when offended Justice has trampled out every spark of hope, and extinguished every ray of consolation !

There appears to be in man a tendency to forget God—to forget the relation in which he stands to Him—to forget his authority, his presence, his government of the world, and the future account which He will require of every man. To remove this forgetfulness, man is reprov'd both by the book of nature, and the book of revelation. The works of God testify of his power, and goodness, and continued presence, in supporting, ruling, and preserving the present order of things. Every thing declares that the Providence of God is at no time suspended, much less wholly withdrawn from the earth. The agency of God is never

inactive ; the life, and beauty, and fertility of the creation are maintained by his omnipresent power, and unwearied beneficence. Thus the book of nature reproves the ingratitude and the sinful forgetfulness of man. The reproof of the Word of God is addressed to him in more emphatical language ; and is calculated to rouse the most careless, and to attract the attention of the most thoughtless. All other creatures are obedient to the will of God ; they depart not from the law under which they were created, either in regard to their habits of life, their appointed dwelling, or the provision prepared for their maintenance. But man, the most noble and perfect of God's creatures, is impatient of the control of his Maker, although tempered with great and undeserved mercy ; he renounces the divine authority, and presumptuously rebels against his Creator ; or he lives in habitual neglect of his commands, and forgetfulness of his presence, and power, and the nature of his government. He makes but small account of the favour of God ; if, indeed, he esteems it worth any inquiry or concern whether his conduct meets with the divine approbation or displeasure. The world engrosses all his thoughts, all his anxiety, all his care ; and the consideration of his moral accountableness, his duty to God, the end of life, the future world, and a judgment to come, is at all times unwelcome to him ; he gladly embraces any employment that may rid

his mind of such things, and catches at every trifle to divert his thoughts from the ever-unpleasant theme of religion. So general is this hardness of heart, this depravity, this perversion of man's original uprightness, that a feeling of shame takes possession of the breast, when a man is suspected of being careful about the immortal interests of his soul. He feels that he is departing from the common course of the world, and that he shall incur the ridicule of being thought to aim at surpassing his fellows in wisdom and holiness. He who renounces his sins, and returns to the forsaken service of his God, is regarded by many as an apostate from his former profession,—not as a penitent sorrowing for his errors and transgressions, and returning to that course of life which the Word of God prescribes, and from which he had wickedly deviated. His companions narrowly observe his renewed conduct,—not for the purpose of imitating what is reasonable, and sincere, and holy; but that they may have the malignant satisfaction of discovering the failings of infirmity, or detecting the obliquities of remaining depravity. While their consciences bear testimony to his better conduct, and wiser choice, they harden themselves in evil, and are strengthened in their wicked courses by that companionship, which always gives vigour and boldness in any cause. Men are encouraged by union and numbers; and when this union is for unholy and

sinful purposes, they seem to act as if their numbers placed them above the control and government of their Maker, and as if their moral responsibility decreased in proportion to the accession gained to their mere numerical force and strength.

The tendency of sin is to harden the human heart. We may trace the progress of this hardening, till it ends in destruction. Look at a youth brought up in the fear of God, and dismissed into the world by his parents with the best advice. He shrinks from the contact of vice. His conscience is tender, and cannot endure the wounds which a guilty conduct inflicts. The very presence of men abandoned to vicious courses, gives him pain, and he seems to himself to contract some moral pollution, even from their contiguity to him. After a time these impressions become more feeble. Constant collision, as it were, with men who have cast off the fear of God, assimilates him in some degree to them ; the broad distinction between good and evil is somewhat lessened ; the hard features of sin are a little softened ; the odiousness of vice loses much of its deformity ; its aspect, from being long beheld, ceases to excite the same horror in his mind ; he can now look on sin without that trembling of heart, which he once experienced. At last he ventures on some small violation of his rectitude, more in compliance with what he sees around him, than

from actual depravation of religious principle ; for he first satisfies himself, (though by false reasoning,) of the trifling nature of the deviation which he is about to make, and with a firm resolution, (as he thinks,) of restricting himself to a defined course, a limited extent, which he is never to overstep. For this small obliquity he feels some checks of conscience ; he is reproved by his better reflections ; but he hardens himself in a short time against this reproof ; he begins to call his tenderness of conscience weak scrupulousness, and his regard to the will of God, superstition. He proceeds to farther lengths of transgression, to greater violations of rectitude ; he is again reproved, and again hardens himself. At times he reflects on the consequences of his pursuits, and resolves on amendment ; but concludes that there is yet good time, and that he needs not be too singular in renouncing his companions and acquaintance. He presumes on his youth, and health, and thinks that maturer years will afford leisure, and bring the inclination to attend again to religious duties. He professes to be waiting for this period, but defers it from day to day, from month to month, from year to year ; till old age finds him persisting in sin with all the obstinacy of confirmed depravity, and the insensibility of a seared conscience.

What is the catastrophe of this career of sin ? Awful indeed is its termination. His heart has

remained callous to all the remonstrances of the Word of God, and of the ministers of the Gospel,—to all the terrors of a future world, and all the threatened denunciations of endless misery,—to all the invitations of mercy, and the pleadings of a compassionate Saviour, and at last recovers its sensibility, when the stroke is already lifted up which is to render it cold and unfeeling in death. His conscience, so long resisted and wounded, till it ceased to reprove—ceased to feel, regains its dominion, when the spirit is at the very threshold of eternity, and on the point of appearing at that tribunal from which there is no appeal. Repentance begins to be excited in his mind, just when he is about to be consigned to endless remorse. He commences his anxious inquiry for the hope of the Gospel, at the moment when despair—hopeless, ever-during despair is appointed to seize on his soul. He calls for the divine mercy—the long-despised and rejected mercy, when the full and fierce anger of God is about to fall on his head, and to seal his everlasting misery. He cries for the once-offered—the long-offered, but ever-slighted pardon of Heaven, when condemnation to hell is the irreversible sentence which is about to be pronounced upon him.

Who can tell the anguish and horror, the keen pangs of remorse which fasten on the heart, and agitate the troubled breast of the dying sinner! There is no order in the armies of sorrows which

press upon him ; he is overwhelmed with fear, and regret, and self-reproach, and bitter remembrance, and dread forebodings. The king of terrors assails him ; he feels his strength departing ; life sinks in him ; the agonies of the last struggle of expiring nature are increased by the greater anguish of his spirit ; he sees the world receding from his dim vision, and apprehends that the gloomy gulf of perdition is opening to receive him. He departs from that state of existence in which alone prayer is heard, repentance accepted, faith is available, and pardon is granted ; and enters on the unchanging, the awful scenes of an eternal world ! “He that being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.” (Prov. xxix. 1.)

Let us consider some of those errors in sentiment, in which men harden themselves against all reproof.

1. Some harden themselves in pretended atheism, and professed infidelity.

We have said *pretended* atheism, because the absolute disbelief of the existence of a God—of a Superior Power, seems so contrary to the natural conscience of man, that an atheist, properly so called, from conviction, was certainly never yet found on the earth. Thus, among the most savage tribes that have ever been discovered, some notion, however dim and obscure, has been found of the existence of an invisible,

Supreme Being. They have, indeed, assigned very unworthy attributes to their god, or gods; and some nations have regarded their deities rather as beings, whose malignity was equal to their power, than as beings disposed to aid the distresses of mankind, to pity their infirmities, and to pardon their sins.—Even the poor Greenlander, scarcely raised in intellectual powers, or earthly condition, above the irrational creatures on which he preys, trembles at the apprehended anger of an unknown God; and fears an invisible world, of which he possesses no correct information, and for his ideas of which, dark, and confused, and painful, as they are, he is indebted either to the gloomy and vague suggestions of his own untutored mind, or to the inventions of his more artful and knavish *angekoks*, or pretended sorcerers.

When we reflect on the perfections of Deity as stated in the Scriptures, and regard our God as a Being of infinite holiness, justice, wisdom, goodness, and truth, as altogether worthy of the best affections of our hearts, and the devoted service of our lives, we may reasonably and justly conclude that those persons, who affect to deny the very existence of such a Being, feel a moral aversion to his perfections, because they are opposed to the gratification of those unruly passions, and unholy desires, which reign in their breasts. They do not so much disbelieve the

existence of a God, as wish that there was no God. "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." (Ps. xiv. 1.) He finds that the existence of the God of the Scriptures necessarily involves him in danger, from the hatred of God to all sin, and the punishment which he has denounced against it; and being resolved not to abandon his evil courses, he endeavours to get rid of the belief that there is any God, he finds it desirable that there should be none, that so he may sin without restraint, and without the tormenting dread of future punishment; and therefore he says in his heart, 'There is no God.'

It would be an almost endless task to run over all the arguments and proofs that might be adduced of the existence of a God; and it is in fact unnecessary in a work of this kind.—For a man, to exercise, or rather, to pervert his reason in denying the existence of an Infinite Intelligence as the Creator of all things, is, in fact, to furnish a contradiction to his own impious assertions; for the possession and exercise of reason and intelligence in man, is of itself a proof of the existence of a Supreme Creator.

There are some who profess to be atheists in sentiment, but their constant endeavour to affix ridicule on those who hold different opinions, is a proof that they are not settled in their own minds, nor satisfied of the truth of the notions which they have ventured to take up with; and

so are led to a constant effort to keep down the reproofs of conscience, and to exclude the conviction which is ready to break in upon them. They vainly think that ridicule cast on those, who hold the faith of the Scriptures, adds reason and argument to uphold their own false and fatal opinions. It does indeed confirm them in their unbelief, but affords no confirmation to their sentiments; it does indeed harden them against the reproof and instruction of the Bible, but does not weaken the mighty mass of evidence, which supports the truth of the Bible.

But if it be unreasonable to deny the existence of a God, how much more so to allow his existence, and to deny his moral government of men. For a man to look on the order of the works of creation, and to deny the exercise of infinite intelligence in the administration of them, is more likely to be the result of a presumptuous, foolhardy arrogance, than the calm conclusion and settled belief of a mind desirous of admitting only incontrovertible truths.

Can any thing be more unreasonable, as well as impious, than to maintain that God has created man on the earth, as the chief work of his hands, and given him a mind capable of knowing his Maker, and of acquiring almost illimitable attainments in knowledge; and then left him as a mere abortive intelligence, to spend a few years of anxious being on the earth, and finally to sink

into dust, and into non-existence! Has man, above all other animals, the faculty of knowing and acknowledging his Maker,—has he those properties of mind, which dispose, as well as capacitate him, for the exercise of trust in his God, reliance on his Providence, hope in his mercy, fear of his displeasure, desire of his approval, anxious solicitude respecting a future state of existence; and are all his moral powers schooled, and improved, and regulated by the exercise of this capacity and the culture of this disposition, and after all are these faculties given him in vain—to no end—with no reference to the government of God! Has the Maker of all things no care for the sole being on earth, who can, and who does trust in him;—has he no regard for man, who rests on the belief of his Providence; has he no pity for him, who is craving his mercy;—has he no love for the creature, who trembles at his apprehended frown, and rejoices in the expectation of his approval;—has he decreed that rational soul to annihilation, in which he first implanted a capacity to conceive of, and to desire a perpetuity of being! Has God indeed given man all these wonderful faculties,—produced in his mind these hopes, fears, and expectations, and bestowed on him the commencement of a progression in knowledge and understanding, merely to quench these lights of the soul, and the soul itself for ever;—to put an

eternal close to the progress of intellect, at the very outset of its promising and pleasing course! This is indeed to deny both the wisdom and goodness of the Deity! This is indeed worse than the denial of his being! This is to allow the existence of a God, and to blaspheme against his perfections! Those who thus impiously assign to the Deity, just that proportion of authority in the world, and that degree of cognizance of human affairs, which shall not be any check to the gratification of their depraved desires, and who dare to limit those attributes, which must be the essential properties of the Godhead, do assume to themselves in ignorant and wicked arrogance, more authority than they are willing to allow to that revelation, which God has been pleased to give of his character and government. They reject a well-authenticated document, which bears the stamp of Heaven, and dare to invent for themselves a God after their own hearts; and presumptuously call on all men to receive their dogmas, to admit their pretended infallibility, to look on them as a sort of divinities, to whose oracles implicit obedience is to be paid!

But, to direct our inquiry to the consequences of this presumptuous denial of the divine existence, and this hardened rejection of the divine government; how will he who denied the being of a God, appear before Him when arrayed in the

dread solemnities of the Judge of all the earth ! How will *he* bear to look on the awful realities of the invisible world, who denied a future state of existence ! Will not *his* restoration to life be insufferable, who professed to believe that when he departed this mortal life, he should sink into non-existence, into annihilation ! How will *he* bear the return of all his vital powers, of all those senses which are either the avenues to pleasurable sensation, or the inlet to agonizing misery, who professed to believe that when this wonderful structure of the body should return to dust in the grave, its divine Architect would blot it from his remembrance, and no more restore it to its former symmetry and proportion ! How will *he* look on the agency of God in judging men, and in assigning to them their final abodes of happiness or of woe, who, although he admitted the being of a God, once denied that he exercised any Providential administration in the world ! Irreparable destruction, hopeless ruin await the hardened impenitent. “ He shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.”—He shall be convinced of the being of a God, by beholding his arm uplifted to smite him with the heaviest rod of his anger, and by hearing his awful voice pronounce his unchangeable doom to an eternity of suffering ! He shall be convinced of the agency of God, in the government of his rational creatures, by beholding him in the exercise of the most solemn,

most decisive act of that administration, and by himself falling under the sentence and condemnation of that just government, that righteous distribution of evil to the evil doer, and of punishment to the transgressor!

2. Others harden themselves in false notions of God—of his character and government.

The only true and uncorrupted source whence we can derive any knowledge of the Supreme Being, is to be found in the Scriptures. Mere natural knowledge will not lead any one to form right notions of their Maker; we must be indebted to revelation for this knowledge. But with the book of God in their hands, men nevertheless create a Deity after their own imaginations, and they proportion his attributes so as to afford countenance, if not encouragement, to their course of life. Hence it is that we so often hear persons speaking of the mercy of God, not in conjunction with their deep and true repentance, but as a balm to heal slightly the wound of sin in their consciences; as a cover for iniquity, not as a powerful motive to abstain from all evil.—Now, with respect to the character of the Deity, as merciful, we cannot estimate this attribute too highly; it is not to be limited by our conceptions, either as to the extent in which it can be exercised, or its duration. Every thing around us attests the mercy of God; our own well-being, and our very existence, declare the same thing. But we

find other perfections besides mercy ascribed to God in the Bible; and we discern at the same time a perfect harmony in the exercise of each. Mercy is never shown to the disparagement of justice; nor is justice executed to the destruction of mercy; nor are promises fulfilled to the annulling of threatenings and denunciations. To mercy which endureth for ever, are joined jealous holiness, inflexible justice, truth which can never pass away, nor fall to the ground. There is in heaven justice to condemn and punish the hardened sinner, as well as mercy to spare and pardon the penitent. Hath not God declared that he will by no means clear the guilty, as well as proclaimed himself "the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth?" (Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.) Is he not "of purer eyes than to behold evil," (Heb. i. 13.) that is, to look on it with indifference or approval, as well as a God "keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin?" Does he promise pardon and acceptance to those who confess and forsake their sins, who acknowledge their backslidings, and return unto him with weeping and with supplication; and has he not also threatened to banish for ever from his presence the impenitent who die in their sins? Will not the same voice which now, in the mild, persuasive accents of mercy, says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy-laden, and

I will give you rest, (Matt. xi. 28.) pronounce also in wrath, the dreaded sentence, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels?" (Matt. xxv. 41.)

Let not any one, then, vainly imagine that he shall continue in sin with impunity, because he dares in presumption to compromise the truth and justice of God, or expects in ignorance that all the perfections of the Godhead, will be merged in the exercise of the sole attribute of mercy. With the Bible before us, we are without excuse if we imagine any other Deity than the God of the Bible. With the Scriptural account of the method of salvation in our hands, we are inexcusable if we forsake it to devise a plan of our own—a plan that shall yield and conform itself to the indulgence of our depravity, and have no regard to the glory of God. We cannot fall into any dangerous—any fatal error, in the all-important concern of religion, without coming under the reproof of the Bible. If we will not try our sentiments by this unerring guide, or having brought them to this test, are obstinately bent on following our own vain imaginations, what can we expect but to reap the fruit of our own ways, and to be filled with our own devices? (Prov. i. 31.) The Word of God cannot be altered in its statements, to suit our pride; in its directions, to accord with our perverseness;

in its doctrines, to accommodate our prejudices ; in its promises, to countenance our depravity ; or in its threatenings , to connive at our presumption. The declaration remains immutable, " He that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."—But if we cast down our hurtful pride, our erring reason, our confirmed prejudices, before the clear and plain statement of Scripture, and receive it in all its declarations, " without partiality, and without hypocrisy," then shall we meet with acceptance before that God, who " resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble ;" (James iv. 7.) who will guide the meek in judgment, and teach them his way ; (Psalm xxv. 9.) and then shall that Word be made profitable to us, " for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction, in righteousness," and we shall become men of God, " perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Timothy iii. 6. 17.)

the report of the Bible. If we will not try our sentences by this meeting guide, or having brought them to this test, are obstinately bent on following our own vain imaginations, what can we expect but to reap the fruit of our own ways, and to be filled with our own devices? (Prov. i. 31.) The Word of God cannot be altered in its statements, to suit our pride ; in its directions, to accord with our perverseness ;

SELF-DECEPTION.

THE human mind never rests satisfied in intire ignorance. The most dull and inert of mankind, have some degree of curiosity, which excites in them a desire to attain to the knowledge of such things as are presented to their observation, or of which they have heard. In some minds, there is an insatiable thirst for information ; they will explore at great personal hazard and with much painful perseverance, the secret operations of nature. The bowels of the earth are ransacked of their stores ; the depth of the ocean cannot conceal from the eye and the grasp of man, the treasures which lie beneath its mighty waves ; the air is traversed beyond the region of the clouds ; the sea is no longer a barrier against the excursions of the mariner, he braves and overcomes the winds and storms, and explores the most distant lands ; with artificial aid the astronomer calculates the magnitude and distance of the stars, and discovers the laws and movements of systems of starry worlds on high ; the powerful agency of fire is employed to analyze the productions of nature, to pursue her into her

secret recesses, and to ascertain some of the wonderful changes and processes by which the present order of things is supported and connected.—But amidst all this eager pursuit of knowledge, this patient, and sometimes perilous investigation of the laws of nature, we find but small concern excited among the generality of mankind, respecting their spiritual interests; very little inquiry what is the will of God; indifference with regard to their future condition in the eternal world; an extensively-prevalent willingness to remain ignorant of their true character.—Pride and depravity combine to keep us unacquainted with ourselves, and unconcerned about the judgment of God.

To love the “praise of men, more than the praise of God,” (John xii. 43.) has ever been a prevalent error among all classes of persons. Those whom the world commends are generally esteemed happy; and the objects of this commendation are led to deceive themselves, in forming an estimate of their own character; they take too low a standard for self-examination, when they adopt human opinion as the arbiter to decide what is the chief good. All that is in the world—having a worldly origin—is the offspring of error and depravity, and cannot be a safe guide in the pursuit of true happiness. The applause of the world is but a poor criterion, whereby to conclude who is a happy man. We may see a

man with a plentiful fortune; he has health, friends, and family; his opinions are much sought after in matters of taste and the fine arts; his correct judgment is greatly admired in the selection of valuable paintings and beautiful sculpture, in the choice of handsome and elegant furniture, in the erection and arrangement of a commodious mansion, in the tasteful disposition of ornamental gardens and pleasure-grounds; he is also kind and amiable, munificent in his charities, and a lover and promoter of peace in his neighbourhood, active in forming and executing plans for the benefit of the poor, and in every respect a useful and valuable member of society:—But here the fair lines in the picture terminate; if we examine further, and carry our inquiries into the state of his heart towards God, and how he fills up his duties as a being dependent on God for all things, as a sinner hopeless and exposed to everlasting ruin without the intervention of Christ the Mediator, as accountable to his Judge for all his conduct, and as an heir of immortal existence in a future world of happiness or sorrow,—we find an alarming deficiency; he never thinks of the relation in which he stands towards his Maker; he has no concern about another state of being; the great end for which he was at first created is unknown, neglected, or forgotten; the grand object of his existence is unaccomplished.

Self-deception prevails in the world to a degree, at which many persons may be surprised, who have not considered the depravity of the human heart, and the deceitfulness of sin. Men are disposed by self-love to think well of themselves—to think more highly of themselves than they ought. And what is the origin of this self-love? It proceeds from pride. Men wish to be free from danger; and as their conscience accuses them of many things, which expose them to the anger of God, and consequently to punishment, they are led from a desire of being in a state of safety, and from an unwillingness to allow of the full extent of their corruptions, to take up with almost any ground of hope that is offered to them, and to rest satisfied with very equivocal marks of possessing those dispositions of mind, and of observing that course of conduct, which are attendant on a state of acceptance with God.

The cases of self-deception which may be detected in the world, are exceedingly numerous. Every one flatters himself that he is free from this insidious vice, and that he is pursuing real pleasure and good, and in the right way—in the way most promising of success. Or, if the conduct of some be too grossly at variance with propriety, to suffer them to call their own particular evil good, yet they deceive themselves with the vain expectation, that they shall one day be satiated with their empty pleasures, and renounce their

forbidden lusts, and return to the paths of holiness and of safety.

What a false view of life is taken by the mere man of pleasure! He seems to regard the end of his existence, to be the gratification of his foolish or sinful desires. His life is one continued course of vanity, or iniquity; he is a mere cumberer of the ground, never forming one useful design, or executing one action worthy of a rational creature; and yet he presumes to ridicule or despise those, who live agreeably to reason—to reason instructed, and corrected, and guided by the Word of God. What a degrading idea of human life, must be formed by such persons! Is man created merely to flutter from folly to folly, or to revel in one excess after another; to live only for himself, and only for the lowest purpose of so low an object—the indulgence of those passions, which proceed from the debasement of his original nature, or the possession of those frivolities which are beneath the pursuit of a being endowed with an immortal spirit! The life of such a person is, as it were, a lie—a contradiction of the design of his Creator. He bears a lie in his right hand. (Isa. xlv. 20.) He never attains to true enjoyment; nor can he ever find that pleasure which will stand the test of time and of examination, or which will bear much repetition. Time may at first be quickly and imperceptibly consumed by a favourite pursuit; but it soon palls

the appetite, and disgusts by the want of novelty. He knows by experience that vanity and deceit are written on earthly pleasures, and yet he continues to weary himself in the fruitless pursuit of that, which has never yielded him any true, any solid, any lasting satisfaction.

How many of these frivolous beings are to be found in society! They are known to exist, solely by the pity or contempt which they excite in the minds of observers; their lives are useless to others, and unprofitable to themselves; their name is never connected with actions that call for the praise and the admiration of men; they sicken and die, and society sustains no loss in their death; no one laments that a useful station is left vacant by their departure, or that any valued and endeared relations of life are severed, or that any purposes and plans of utility are broken off. O! who that is worthy of the name of man, can be contented so to live, that when death comes, he should leave the world without having fulfilled one useful purpose of existence, or left one honourable recollection of his memory, and no one be found to shed the tear of esteem and affection on his grave!

There is another lamentable ground of self-deception, which though often noticed, is unhappily still too frequent to be passed without notice; and that is, the lie of infidelity.—What a perversion of reason, to seek comfort in a sys-

tem which tears up the root of all true consolation ! The conscience of the infidel belies all his vain professions. He is not at rest ; he does not so believe what he wishes to be true, as to be free from alarming fears and distressing apprehensions.—A reasonable being, who understood the nature of his condition on the earth, and who felt how much he stands in need of guidance, and assistance, and comfort, and who sought a rational hope of happiness in a future state of being, would gladly embrace a system which offered him all these advantages, and which had supplied them in inexhausted abundance to numberless generations of men, in all ages of the world. And what is the source of all these blessings, but the Word of God ! The truth of the Bible is most apparent, from the single consideration of its exact suitableness to the condition of man, and the solid assurance which it gives to that innate expectation, and that inextinguishable desire of immortality, which are found in every breast. The Bible is so adapted to our character and condition, that it carries with it in this respect, a proof of its divine original ; only He who knew the heart of man, could supply a system of morals adapted to man. Every command in Scripture implies a disposition in man to disobedience ; and respecting every sin that is forbidden, we shall find on inquiry, that there is a tendency in man's depravity to commit that particular sin. The

infidel rejects the Scriptures, but does not pretend to supply their place by any thing which shall give a sure direction to the conduct, or an abiding peace and rest to the conscience. On the contrary, he affects to think that conscience itself is among the inventions of human deceit; that it is the result of early impressions made on the childish imagination, by false grounds of fear and folly of superstition. He takes away the sun, and assures you that darkness is better than light; he cuts off hope, and offers you despair as a better possession!

This deceit of infidelity adds to the evil consequences of self-deception, the guilt of wilful rejection of truth, and deliberate reception of error. The *unbeliever* is properly so called, for he discredits his own professed creed, and fears lest there should be truth in that which he renounces. A consciousness that his aim is neither to make himself personally better, nor relatively more useful, not to strengthen the ties of honour, and rectitude, and purity, and obedience; but to rid himself of the sanctions of divine law, that he may sin fearlessly; that he may lose the terrors of God's anger, in a disbelief of his notice of human actions; that the dread of a future judgment may be obliterated by a struggle to keep down the hope of immortality, and by a pretended expectation of sinking after death into annihilation. Professing to understand and exercise the

right use of reason, he first violates its most distinguishing property, that of raising us above the beasts of the field, by enabling us to acknowledge our Maker. The infidel debases human nature, instead of ennobling it; he classes himself in the lowest grade of creation, by asserting that he was made for no object, but to be the sport of accident, to grasp at the small share of enjoyment which disease and disappointment and a thousand obstacles leave for his uncertain portion, to grovel in the indulgence of his sensual appetites, and to pervert, in debasing pursuits, those powers and noble faculties of the mind, which were given him to glorify his Creator by denying all ungodliness, and preparing for heaven by a due discharge of all the duties of life. "A deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?" (Isa. xlv. 20.)

There is not a more common case of self-deception, than in the mistaken notions which are entertained by very many persons, respecting the nature of religion. While all allow that it is a concern of great moment, and that the knowledge of it can be derived only from the Bible, few think seriously enough of it to become diligent readers of their Bibles, in order to ascertain what is the will of God. They make out a system of religion according to their own imaginations—such a system as is congenial with the natural

depravity of the human heart, and the frivolity of the human mind. Every individual who is thus blinded by self-deception, concludes that religion does not oppose his own particular pursuits, or any of his modes of seeking pleasure. Religion is supposed to accommodate itself, with ready compliance, to the characters, and conduct, and sentiments of men, and not to effect that change in erroneous sentiments, and to produce that renovation of worldly character, and to exercise that influence over unholy actions, which will assimilate the whole man to its own sacred and heavenly likeness.

What an incorrect estimate do some persons form, of the nature and requirements of true religion! We hear them talk much of religion's not forbidding the social pleasures of life; and by making use of, or rather by abusing this undeniable truth, they think to cloak themselves from punishment, while they indulge many habits which are totally contrary to the spirit and commands of the Gospel. Religion is favourable to all social pleasures, which are not either sinful in themselves, or which do not generally lead to sin. Many things may be harmless in themselves, but the general perversion of them to unlawful ends, or the general use of them in a manner unworthy of rational beings, and inconsistent with the true profession of Christianity, renders it imperative on every sincere Christian steadily to refrain from

them. It is not enough to ask, without fear of a condemnatory reply, What harm is in them? The harm is not in the things themselves, but in the manner in which they are generally used; and until there is a general reformation of this manner, they must be renounced by every one who would preserve that distinguishing mark of "pure religion and undefiled," namely, "to keep himself unspotted from the world." (James i. 27.)

The charge against the friends of true religion, that they wish to make every one as dull and melancholy as themselves, and to deprive people of enjoyment, is scarcely worthy of a reply; because the promoters of the objection are conscious that their own aim is to justify their conduct to the world, and to persuade themselves that by urging a charge against those who endeavour to live agreeably to the Gospel, as well as to receive its promises,—a charge, which though without any foundation in truth, has nevertheless some appearance of plausibleness,—they shall exonerate themselves from culpability.

Such persons are conscious that they do not desire to live consistently with religious requirements, but to make religion agreeable, or at least tolerable to themselves. They are often very zealous in keeping up an attention to all the outward services of religion, and are willing to admit the importance of so solemn a transaction between God and man, and that it should influence

people in keeping them honest and industrious, in making good servants and upright tradesmen ; in short, any thing except the exercise of a transforming influence over their own hearts and lives. They will not allow religion to interfere with their private life, so as to stamp its hallowed impression on any part of it, and to restrain them from every thing which has a tendency to debase the affections and to turn the heart from God. Religion is readily enough stated by such persons as not forbidding pleasure and profit, and so they do not suffer it to have any influence at all in following their own pleasure, or pursuing their own gains. Being too well informed to neglect religion wholly, or openly to ridicule it, they are satisfied with a few formal attentions to some of its duties ; but never admit it to enter, much less to reign in the heart. A deceived heart hath turned them aside, that they cannot deliver their soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in our right hand ? That is, they are so much under the power of self-deception, which they have willingly indulged, that they are unable to detect their error and to rectify it,—unable to see their danger, and to flee from it.

Again—The self-righteous person carries a lie in his right hand ; he is under the influence of a fatal delusion ; the ground of his hope is false ; his plea of acceptance with God will be rejected, or will cover him with confusion. Many persons

disclaim self-righteousness, who are nevertheless living under its influence.—A man may call Christ the Saviour, and profess to look for pardon and eternal life through his mediation ; but at the same time, his real, his habitual, his practical dependence is on his own performances, on his own merit. He thinks to establish a claim on the divine favour, by his own obedience and good works ; and thus, while he admits the Gospel in words, he contradicts it in practice, and is indulging and cherishing a spirit which is at direct variance with the nature and design of the Gospel. Our sole, our intire ground of hope, our only claim to divine pardon and acceptance must be founded on the Cross of Christ. We must be willing—we must be desirous to receive the forgiveness of our sins and the promise of eternal life, as benefits purchased for us wholly and intirely by the death and obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ, without any the smallest portion of human merit, as a procuring cause. “The gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Rom. vi. 23.)

We may deceive ourselves in regard to our motives, in religious actions. We should therefore examine ourselves, in order to ascertain what it is that influences us. No rational being acts in any case of importance, without some assignable motive. We may have acquired the habit of attending to religious duties, so that when we

perform them, we are unable to name the real motive ; we do them because we have been long accustomed to do them. Perhaps, also, there is a secret desire in the heart, of being able to make out by our performances, a secure ground of acceptance with God,—a secret belief that his anger cannot fall on us who observe the duties, which are commanded in the Holy Scriptures ; although at the same time, the manner in which they should be discharged, and the motive which should prompt to the performance, and the aim which should be proposed in the duty, are unknown or disregarded.—A mistake as to the source of all spiritual power, is at the root of this self-righteous service. If a belief that God is truly the author of “ all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works,” accompanied the conviction that the service of God and a conformity to his will were duties of indispensable obligation, men would not fall into the two-fold error of undertaking the discharge of these duties in their own strength, and of substituting them for any part of the mediation of Christ, as a ground of acceptance with God. We should know, and act according to the knowledge, that the Holy Spirit is the author and giver of all spiritual life in the soul of man. His holy influence first enlightens the mind, opens the heart to receive the message of grace, creates love to God, keeps alive every right motive and aim, maintains correct sentiments, helps to the

performance of every good work, leads and guides in the way of truth and peace, holds us up all our life-time in the way of salvation, and conducts us to the realms of happiness and glory.

Many persons may be said to be *religious*, who are not *Christians*. They believe in the existence and superintending power of God ; they feel their own weakness, and, in some degree, their own guilt, and are disposed to acknowledge that their help must come from God alone, and that they stand in need of pardon. They never question the propriety of religious services ; they observe a form of prayer, and attend regularly on the worship of God ; they profess to be looking for a judgment to come, and to be endeavouring to attain to the heavenly state. But amidst all these important facts and pursuits, there is no genuine Christianity ; the Gospel-dispensation is not understood ; they do not deny that Christ has come in the flesh, and that he is the Saviour, but there is no practical regard to him in that character in their system. The peculiar doctrines of the Gospel are neither received nor understood ; and therefore they are not humbled under a deep conviction of natural depravity, and of exposure to certain and endless ruin, as sinners against the Most High God. They ascribe their sins to the common infirmity of human nature, and not to the general depravity of the human heart ; and thus they look upon sin almost as much in the light of

a misfortune, as a crime. Hence they see no great heinousness or aggravation in its nature, for man is weak; and no great difficulty in the way of its being pardoned, for God is merciful. They do not feel the utter hopelessness of man's condition, without the intervention of a Redeemer; and therefore they have no true faith in Christ as that Redeemer. They acknowledge that the merey of God must be the ground of their hope; but in such a way, that their own works and doings are in some sort to earn that mercy, or to fit them for the reception of it; and thus they miss the great and important truth, that the mercy of God is imparted only in Christ Jesus. They acknowledge the necessity of pardon, but do not feel the want of a justifying righteousness. They express a desire for comfort, but none for sanctification. Their object (in the small degree in which they pursue it,) is to attain heaven, but not to seek with daily earnestness a preparation and meetness for that holy state.

We may ask such characters, with respect to Christianity, What do they believe? Do they believe any thing of the peculiar doctrines which it reveals? Or is their faith only a mere admission of the truth of the Christian religion, without any acquaintance with the great facts which it states, or the important truths which it makes known, or the holy dispositions and spiritual

duties which it enjoins and inculcates ? The true state of mind of many persons who are called Christians, is a total ignorance of the grand peculiarities of the Gospel. If a Jew be converted to Christianity, or a heathen be brought to embrace the holy religion of Jesus Christ, each of them receives something which he did not possess before ; his mind is enlightened ; he has acquired something of infinite importance, something of inestimable value ; and he rejoices in the treasure, he esteems it as a pearl of great price. But many who are called believers of the Gospel, really have no true faith at all. They have just what early instruction has implanted in the mind, and nothing more ; so that their religion and their prejudices have the same origin, and one exercises as much beneficial effect and influence on the heart and conduct as the other.—If God was manifest in the flesh, if Christ died on the Cross, there must have been an adequate cause ; and to be unimpressed by the fact, is to be ignorant of the cause ; and to be ignorant of the cause, is not to know our condition as sinners, the exigencies of our case, or to have a due concern about an interest in the blessings of redemption. Yet, it is to be feared, that such is the situation of very many persons, who nevertheless think themselves very good Christians. Such a religion as this cannot conduct to heaven ; it is in reality built on self-righteousness—a false foundation !

It is a religion unconnected with a Saviour ; there is a Providence in it, but no grace ; a God, but no Christ !

Some persons of good natural disposition, and in easy worldly circumstances, are apt to flatter themselves into very complacent notions of their own character. There is nothing in their condition of life, or natural temperament, peculiarly adapted to excite the depravity of the heart, and therefore they conclude those sins to be vanquished, which have, in fact, never risen up in rebellion ; they take the praise, and expect the reward of the conqueror, although, in reality, they have never fought the “ good fight of faith,” nor striven for mastery in the struggle between the flesh and the Spirit ; they account themselves established in Christian principles, but they have never yet suffered the trial and test of severe temptation.

Circumstances develope character. We should not, therefore, be hasty in forming opinions of ourselves, or of others. We ought to examine ourselves rigidly, and to condemn every thing in us that is contrary to truth, as well as allow every thing that is agreeable to the Word of God. We may judge too hastily and severely of ourselves, by comparing our own character with that of some other persons, whom we exalt too highly in our estimation. Perhaps if these persons were placed in the same station, in which we often find our-

selves overcome by force of temptation, they would not maintain the conflict with more honour than we have done. The condition of a man, as to his worldly calling, is often at variance with his natural temper ; his occupation is a continual trial to him ; it excites his depravity into daily and hourly action. Whereas, when condition and temper agree, all things go on smoothly ; and men are apt to take much praise to themselves, (and others are inclined to give them great praise,) for what is, in fact, the result of no virtuous effort on their part, but only the placid movements of a mind at ease in itself, and not exposed to sharp trial.

The only true standard, by which to judge ourselves, and to ascertain our true character, is the Word of God. The distinguishing marks of a true Christian are there plainly set down, so that we may know whether we yet bear any of the features of the renewed man. And the evidences of advancement in the Christian life are also as clearly described, so that we may form a correct judgment whether we are growing in grace. It is certain that the moral likeness to God, in righteousness and true holiness, which our first father lost, must be renewed in us in some measure, or we cannot have a Scriptural hope of seeing the face of God, or of enjoying his presence for ever. We may possess many qualities, really estimable in themselves, and much valued among

men ; but our spiritual character, and, therefore, our final condition in another world, will be decided by a judgment which differs very widely from the world's opinion. Men may be amiable, but they cannot be holy without the especial aid of divine grace ; they may be useful in society, but they cannot be meet for heaven without the renovating influence of the Holy Spirit. The garb of Christianity is very different from its hallowed spirit. Its form and its outward profession may be had and observed, while its real nature is unknown, and its genuine and sacred influence and power are unfelt.

How is it, that we see many persons who never pray in sincerity and truth, who are yet more amiable than some of those that profess to hold daily communion with God ? How is it, that we see many persons whose conduct is guided by the purest morality, who are honest, upright, useful characters, and who yet think not at all of religion ; it does not influence them as a motive in any part of their conduct ; they never think seriously of the relation in which they stand towards God ; while others, who profess to think much of these things, who seem to desire to know the will of God, and to seek to please him, to meditate daily on the solemnities of the grave, death, eternity, and a judgment to come, manifest, nevertheless, a life and conversation at variance with the plainest dictates of justice, truth, and

honesty ;—or, at least, do not, in their spirit and conduct, exemplify the holy doctrines of the Gospel, or bring glory to God? Such persons, it is to be feared, content themselves with the mere knowledge of the great truths connected with man's salvation, and with being able to state them at any time in a clear and plain manner. And because they possess this knowledge, and know that the divine Spirit is the author of all right understanding in heavenly things, they flatter themselves that they are the subjects of divine teaching, and know the Gospel aright, although they do not practise it. They deceive themselves from day to day, in the vain hope that it shall go well with them at last, although they dishonour the Gospel daily by their evil practice. Such persons do not wilfully deceive themselves ; they really desire to be saved—and to be saved by the free grace of God, disclaiming all merit of their own ; but they are so “ tied and bound by the chain of their sins,” that they are unable to walk according to the holy liberty of the children of God. Where the path of duty is plain to other persons, they are often in perplexity what course to pursue ; because they never take the direct road which honour and probity point out, but ever act with some mental reservation, so that they may afterwards have a by-way, whereby to indulge their natural disposition for dishonest evasion or mean prevarication. Hence they are

often raising doubts and difficulties, as though their life was exposed to peculiar perplexity, and they were really anxious to adopt the best line of conduct, but were doubtful which to embrace. But to an honest heart, there are in reality but few cases of conscience, strictly so called—but few situations in which an upright intention and an undisguised heart will be at a loss to know which is the path of duty.

They seem merely to attend to the plain duties of religion, as indispensable obligations, not as valuable privileges. They appear not to think that these religious services should extend their influence over the heart and life. They assume the habit of devotion, but it is all outward form and appearance, and none of the inward power is felt. They read the Bible, but it is with less self-application, than with understanding, for they are really enlightened with knowledge in divine things; they pray, but feel little desire, the discharge of the duty being rather their aim, than the obtaining of spiritual blessings; they confess their sins, but fear prompts them to the confession, rather than godly sorrow, contrition, and a broken heart; their performance of devotional exercises is often attended with great emotion of mind, with sighs and many tears, but their subsequent conduct does not show that they have been partakers of that communion with God, which assimilates the soul to the divine

image ; on the contrary, their temper retains all its acerbity, their passions are untamed, their tongue is unbridled. Surely, we may fear that such religion is vain !

Whether such persons will find acceptance with God, in their daily repentance and confession of their sins, and whether their faith, directed by knowledge to the only true atonement for sin, will be available to their justification, must remain unknown till the great day of decision. In the mean time, however, they have not the enjoyment of a well-grounded hope ; fear, tormenting fear and apprehension keep them in continual bondage ; they cleave to the profession of religion, as to something which they dare not renounce, but from which they derive no heart-felt pleasure, no calm, tranquil delight, no cheering anticipations. They attend punctually to religious duties, join in the public services of the church, retire to their closets for meditation and secret prayer to God, read their Bibles, and are the subjects of the deepest convictions of their guilt and helplessness ; but their love to God is too feeble a principle, to keep them back from sinning against him daily by repeated transgressions, by reiterated falls into the same besetting sins.—It is not pretended that the true Christian never falls again into those sins, which he has once confessed to God, and for which he has felt sincere repentance. What the Scriptures condemn is, the total want

of a change of heart, and an amendment of the conduct ; so that where the hope of eternal life is professed to be sought with diligence, the power and dominion of sin are still triumphant in the heart, and usurp that place which should be occupied by the love and fear of God. Every man who knows any thing of the weakness of the human mind, and the depravity of human nature, will feel and acknowledge that in many things he daily offends, and that he has continual need to apply to that fountain which is opened "for sin and for uncleanness." (Zech. xiii. 1.) How often does the heart

"Vow all itself to heaven, yet vow in vain,
Sigh for its thoughts, yet fondly think again!"

How often are we so disposed to resign ourselves intirely to the will and service of God, that we fondly hope we shall henceforth refrain from every thing that would displease our Heavenly Father, or that would in any degree abate our devotedness to him! How often have we had the clearest convictions of what were our particular duties and obligations, and how often have we formed the best and strongest resolutions to be "steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." But the first temptation draws us aside; we find the snares of the world too thickly and too artfully laid, for our feet to escape the entanglements; and the lusts

of the flesh convince us that we shall never be entirely free from sin, till "this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality." (1 Cor. xv. 54.)

Their religion is the source of continual terror, instead of being the foundation of peace, and the director of their lives in the ways of holiness. Too much enlightened to think lightly of the importance of religion, they seem to mistake its true nature ; and thus, that which should be the joy and rejoicing of the heart, is to them a heavy yoke of bondage. They are not ignorant of the tendency of true religion, as conducing to lasting peace of mind ; but the condemnation of heart (1 John iii. 20.) which attends a conversation unworthy of the Gospel, deters them from embracing that hope towards God, which is only found in the pleasant and peaceful path of celestial wisdom. The utmost of their comfort is a strong desire to find mercy with God, in the day of his judgment, and an earnest endeavour to persuade themselves that the exceeding riches of divine grace, and the abounding merits of the Redeemer will be extended to characters (among whom they know themselves to be classed,) who know the Gospel, although they do not live agreeably to it ; who name the name of Christ, as the only Saviour, but who do not depart from iniquity.

There is a self-deception which is peculiar to those, who "were once enlightened, and have

tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the Word of God, and the powers of the world to come." (Heb. vi, 4, 5.) Such persons, having declined into a backsliding state, are often deceived by the hope of pardon, even while they are living in open sin. When men decline in the power of religion, they are generally more tenacious than ever of the forms of religion. Being conscious that they have lost the "thing signified"—the "inward and spiritual grace," they wish to retain the "outward and visible sign," that they may have at least the semblance of that grace, from which they have fallen. It is no new thing for men to have a "form of godliness," while they deny the "power thereof." (2 Tim. iii. 5.) Having left the peace of God, they lull themselves into a deceitful repose, relying on their knowledge of the way of salvation, instead of walking in that way; presuming on their former attainments, instead of hastily forsaking their present evil ways.

A man in this dangerous state of mind, professes to rely on the exceedingly great promises of God, and talks much of the riches of free grace, and of the unchangeable love of God; but when he is spoken to of the anger of God against sin, and of the curse denounced against those who draw back from the paths of godliness, he listens with a contemptuous smile, affecting to pity the igno-

rance of those, whose knowledge of the Gospel leads them to conclude that "faith without works is dead," and that the promises of the Gospel are fulfilled only in those, who are thereby made "partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust,"—(2 Pet. i. 4.) who are endeavouring to "abstain from all appearance of evil," (1 Thess. v. 22.) and are ever exercising themselves in the doctrines of the Gospel, "to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men." (Acts xxiv. 16.) The backslider may "bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart;" (Deut. xxix. 19.) but "the Lord will not spare him." If sorrows be not sent on an errand of mercy in this life, to recal him to repentance and the true knowledge of God,—if he continue to despise the riches of God's "goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering," not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth him to repentance, there is the strongest reason to fear that he is treasuring up unto himself "wrath against the day of wrath," (Rom. ii. 4, 5.) and that he will fall under that final and dreadful sentence of the Almighty, "This shall ye have of mine hands, ye shall lie down in sorrow!" (Isa. l. 11.)

SOURCE AND DUTY OF CHRISTIAN JOY.

THE Gospel is intirely a dispensation of mercy to the human race. The origin of it is the love of God,—the personage whom it announces as a Deliverer, is the Lord Jesus—the Saviour of the world,—and the tidings which it proclaims are pardon, redemption, and eternal life. The blessings of the Gospel are within the reach of every human being to whom they are made known ; with the publication of the Gospel is declared the free offer of all its great, and glorious, and unspeakable blessings. At its first annunciation to the world, it was accompanied by the songs of “ a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” These happy spirits contemplated with delight, the mercy which was about to be shown to a guilty and miserable world ; they anticipated with pleasure the joy which should be in heaven, when the innumerable company of those redeemed from the earth, should enter the celestial regions with songs of triumph on their lips, and palms of victory in their hands, and everlasting crowns of glory on their heads. Let not us, then, by a

mistaken conception of the nature and terms of the Gospel, represent it as the source of gloom and despondency to any, or as a denunciation of wrath and judgment, rather than as a message of peace and reconciliation. Truly, it calls for our loudest songs of praise, for our most joyous thanksgiving, for our most ardent expressions of gratitude. All who hear of its benefits should be glad and rejoice, all who partake thereof should turn their mourning into joy, and their weeping into songs of praise. "Let the inhabitants of the rock sing." (Isa. xlii. 2.)

Figurative language is often employed in Scripture to illustrate the character of the Deity, and the privileges of the Church. God is often compared to a Rock, to denote his Strength, his Stability, and the Refuge and Defence which he affords to the weak and the destitute.

A Rock is the emblem of Strength; and of God it is said, "The Lord liveth; and blessed be my Rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted." "Who is God, save the Lord? Who is a Rock; save our God?" (Ps. xviii. 46. 2 Sam. xxii. 32.) And to him David prayed in trouble, saying, "Be thou my strong Rock, for a house of defence to save me." (Ps. xxvi. 2.) Irresistible power and strength belong unto God: as the Creator of all things, all are subservient to his holy will; angels and archangels move with swift obedience to perform his loved commands; he turneth the hearts

of men whithersoever he will, and maketh them the instruments of fulfilling his providential designs; and the rebellious spirits in the depths of despair, with Satan their prince, the "tall archangel" who fell "as lightning from heaven," bow beneath the uncontrollable power of the Supreme God; he turneth the mighty orbs of the universe with his finger, and maintaineth them all in their appointed courses by his wondrous power; they shine at his command, and at his bidding their light is eclipsed by thick clouds, and the face of the heaven is overspread with darkness; "with clouds he covereth the light, and commandeth it not to shine." "He stretcheth out the North over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing; he bindeth up the waters in his thick clouds; he holdeth back the face of his throne, and spreadeth his cloud upon it. He hath compassed the waters with bounds, until day and night come to an end. The pillars of heaven tremble, and are astonished at his reproof. He divideth the sea with his power, and by his understanding he smiteth through the proud. By his Spirit he hath garnished the heavens." "He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength; who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered? Who removeth the mountains, and they know not; who overturneth them in his anger; who shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble; who commandeth

the sun, and it riseth not; and seaeth up the stars; who alone spreadeth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waters of the sea; who maketh Arcturus, Orion, and Pleiades, and the chambers of the South; who doeth great things past finding out; yea, and wonders without number." "Lo, these are parts of his ways; but how little a portion is heard of him? but the thunder of his power who can understand?" (Job ix. 4—10. xxvi. 7—13, 14. xxxvi. 32.)

A rock is the emblem of stability; and in this sense our God is fitly compared to a Rock, for of him it is said "Thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end." (Psalm cii. 27.) He is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever;" (Heb. xiii. 8.) with him "is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." (James i. 17.) He is stable with respect to his purposes, which are eternal. "He is in one mind, and who can turn him." (Job. xxii. 13.) "His ways are everlasting." (Habak iii. 6.) His counsels are founded on infinite wisdom and goodness, and shall all be accomplished by unchanging faithfulness, and boundless power. His purpose of mercy towards all those of the human race, who receive the salvation which is declared unto them, shall be fully perfected in their everlasting redemption; and at the same time his dreadful threatenings against impenitence, and unbelief, and sin, are secured in their fulfilment by the same stability, the same faith-

fulness, the same power. The unchangeable nature of God secures the perpetuity of the present order of things, till all his will is fulfilled. It is to this stability in his purposes, and faithfulness in the execution of them, that we are indebted for our preservation and continuance on the earth. The sins of mankind are so grievous and enormous, that they would immediately bring down the judgments of God upon them, and the flames which are to destroy or purify this earth, would immediately break forth, were not our God unchangeable. "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." (Mal. iii. 6.)

God is stable in his merey, it "endureth for ever;" it "is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him." (Psalm ciii. 17.) Nothing shall be able to turn aside the current of his love and merey from those who trust in him. He will be faithful to every declaration of grace and pardon, that he has made in his holy Word, notwithstanding our daily sins and provocations, for his merey extends even to *them*. "I will be merciful," saith the Lord, "to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." (Heb. viii. 12.) If this purpose of merey were founded on our necessity only, and regulated by our grateful reception, and diligent improvement of it, we should be in continual uncertainty whether it would finally be

extended to us, and should be filled with dreadful terrors, lest it should be withdrawn in anger, and be “clean gone for ever.” But having for its origin the divine love,—for its security the divine immutability,—and for its meritorious and procuring cause the perfect mediation of Christ; instead of uttering the language of despondency and doubt, and saying, “Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?” (Psalm lxxvii. 7—9.) We may exclaim with the animation of hope, and the confidence of faith, “The Lord will not cast off for ever; but though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies.” (Lam. iii. 31, 32.) “He will turn again; he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities.” (Mic. viii. 19.)

He is stable in his government of the world. “Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations.” (Psalm cxlv. 13.) His kingdom of Providence is stable. “While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.” (Gen. viii. 22.) That wonderful beauty and harmony which we every where behold in the works of God,—the subserviency of all the parts to the general good of the whole,—the maintenance of the several orders of creatures,—the provision made for the supply of the

wants both of man and beast,—the rolling ocean with its waves and billows, and the innumerable species of the finny tribe which inhabit it,—the magnitude and grandeur of the celestial orbs, which move in silent but majestic courses, and with unvarying regularity,—all attest the extent of the divine government, and its immutable stability. Could we for a moment suppose that God, having established a certain order of things at the beginning, had now left the world to a sort of chance, or rather, fated accident, (to use a contrariety of expression ;) we might rationally be filled with uncertainty and fear, respecting the continuance of that providential guidance, and support, and defence, which we feel to be so necessary to our well-being on the earth. And if we are told by cold-hearted infidelity, that the continuance of the present system of the universe, is secured by the almighty *fiat* pronounced at the creation, although there is now no actual interference of divine power, or superintendence, or care in mundane affairs; our minds feel a desponding vacancy; we are conscious that no gratitude—that delightful emotion—can be excited in the breast of him, who considers himself at the mercy of a blind fate; no confidence, no hope—the sweetener of human existence—can arise in the heart, which believes itself and all its affairs, to be impelled or guided by a mere insensible mechanism!—Such is not the heartless creed of the christian. We know that “the Lord reigneth :

he is clothed with majesty ; the Lord is clothed with strength, wherewith he hath girded himself ; the world also is established, that it cannot be moved ;"—(Psalm xcii. 1.)—that the divine omnipresence secures all necessary interference and assistance,—that the divine omnipotence maintains the earth on its foundations, its creatures in their allotted order, its seasons in their regular return and beneficial consequences, the motions of the stupendous orbs of heaven, and their salutary influence and extended utility ;—and that the divine character assures us of the stability of the divine government. Hence arises our grateful praise to God for his abundant and seasonable mercies ; and here our confidence and our hope find their sure foundation, their encouragement, their continuance.

The kingdom of grace is also stable. Of this we have the same assurance, the same promises, the same security. His mercy is in the heavens, and his faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds. He hath provided a salvation which is freely offered to all, in all its rich extent and unspeakable glories ; he hath prepared a heaven which shall be enjoyed by all his people in inconceivable happiness, and everlasting duration. The love which devised this redemption, is the love of God " which passeth knowledge ;" (Eph. iii. 19.) the atonement which purchased this redemption, is the mediation of Jesus Christ, " who is able to

save to the uttermost ;" (Heb. vii. 25.) the justification which gives a title to this redemption, is the righteousness of God which is everlasting, and is "by faith of Jesus Christ unto all, and upon all them that believe;" (Rom. iii. 22.) and the Spirit which sanctifies and prepares for the enjoyment of this redemption, is the Spirit of God, which "helpeth our infirmities," and which beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." (Rom. viii. 16, 26.) Thus we find the stability of the kingdom of grace; it is founded on the perfection and perpetuity of those attributes of God, in which it originated, and by which it is completed and secured. If we look at the love of its Author, we hear him saying, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." (Jerem. xxxi. 3.) If we inquire of his kindness, he says "with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee." (Isa. liv. 8.) Do we desire to be informed of the duration of him whose sceptre sways dominion over this kingdom of grace? He is the "true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king." (Jerem. x. 10.) All these assurances combine to establish our faith and hope, that all who receive the declarations of the Gospel, shall "be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation." (Isa. xlv. 17.)

A rock is, further, a refuge, a place of defence and security. The strong-holds of a country are constructed in places which naturally are defensi-

ble, and in many points inaccessible ; and a high rock generally offers both these advantages. A vast tower built in such a situation, is a last and safe resort from a powerful enemy ; hither the wearied and dispirited warriors flee, and find security and rest. In allusion to all these benefits, the divine protection and favour are often compared to a rock. "Be thou my strong habitation," said David, "whereunto I may continually resort ; thou hast given commandment to save me, for ~~though~~ art my rock and my fortress." "The Lord is my defence ; my God is the rock of my refuge." (Ps. lxxi. 3. xciv. 22.)

The benign character of the Deity, is not only set before us most clearly in Revelation, and attested by all the works of his hands, but it is in some degree written on the heart of man, and makes a part of what is termed Natural Religion. Men may rely in common cases of difficulty and danger on their own strength and resources, on their own craft and policy ; but when perils of unusual magnitude, that seem at once to mock all human force, are impending, their last, their only resort is God. To Him the mind naturally turns, with more or less degree of earnestness and hope, according to the proportion of religious knowledge that has been attained ; but there is a general persuasion, (in many persons, indeed, of a very faint character, but found in some degree in all minds,) amounting to a natural principle

in our constitution, that God is every where present, that all things are under his control, that he exercises an invisible agency over events, that he is almighty, and therefore able to succour, that he is merciful, and therefore willing to deliver. God has endowed us with a measure of bodily strength, and mental faculty, suited to our condition, and which we are diligently to use and apply according to our particular situation, and to the actual demand made upon these resources ; but they are available only to a fixed extent, beyond which the divine interference alone can be effectual. And we ought ever to bear in mind that it is the divine favour which bestowed every power of body and soul, that the divine blessing maintains them in being, that the divine energy supplies them with force and activity, “for in him we live, and move, and have our being ;” (Acts xxii. 28.) and in every common and inferior degree of difficulty and peril, we are as much, though not so apparently, indebted to his defence, as in circumstances of appalling danger, and overwhelming calamity : he is our daily and hourly “refuge and strength, a *very present* help in trouble.” (Psalm xlvii. i.)

By the prophet Isaiah it was foretold of the Saviour, that he should be “as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.” (xxxii. 2.) The full force of this figure can only be understood, by considering the condition of travellers, in the hot,

parched soil of some parts of the East. "In some tracts," says a late traveller, "not a tree is to be seen; nor a rock which can offer a shelter or shade. A transparent atmosphere, an intense sun darting its beams upon our heads, a ground almost white, and commonly of a concave form, like a burning-glass, slight breezes scorching like flame." To men in such circumstances, how grateful, how reviving to be led to a rock that is higher than they! But *this* rock can afford them only a temporary shelter and relief; they must again encounter the intense heat of the sun, and again with painful steps pursue their wearisome course over the burning sand of the desert;—the rock does not accompany them. Not so the refuge which the christian finds in his God; here he has a rock which follows him throughout his pilgrimage; (1 Cor. x. 4.) the sure defence which it yields can never fail, the refreshing shade which it imparts can never be removed; for "he that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall *abide* under the shadow of the Almighty." (Psalm xci. 1.)

"God is known for a refuge;" (Ps. xlviii. 3.) a refuge from every trouble, from whatever cause it may arise. In troubles from the *world*, he is a "refuge for us." He will defend his servants from "envy, hatred, and malice," from the "strife of tongues," and from the machinations of evil men; for "when a man's way's please the

Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." (Prov. xiii. 7.) In troubles from the *flesh*, he is the rock of our strength. When our condition in the world is closely connected with circumstances, which naturally tend to excite our evil passions; or when the force of unexpected occurrences, calls forth our corrupt affections in all their strength and depravity, God alone is our rock and our salvation. And in all assaults from our spiritual adversary, he only is our defence. The wiles, and cunning, and power of the malignant spirit, would be sufficient to overcome us in every conflict, if we were left to wage the war unaided, and had no other than natural strength for the fight, and no weapons but those which are "carnal." But when the divine strength is made perfect in our weakness, and we are harnessed with "the whole armour of God," we are made "able to withstand in the evil day;" and the "weapons of our warfare are mighty through God," and we become able to contend "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." (Eph. vi. 11—13.)

If such, then, be the privileges of "the inhabitants of the Rock," we shall do well in endeavouring to point out who are these "inhabitants," and to enforce their duties and obligations; that we may ascertain whether God hath set *our* feet on this Rock, and established *our* goings. (Ps. xl. 2.)

They who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, "shall dwell on high;" their "place of defence shall be the munition of rocks." (Isa. xxxiii. 16.) They have felt their danger as sinners, and having beheld the "avenger of blood"—the penalties of a broken law—pursuing them, have fled for their lives to the refuge of the "Rock of ages." They feel their weakness and infirmities, and come for strength to the Rock of stability. They are oppressed with the burden of indwelling sin, an ensnaring world, and a subtle, spiritual enemy,—they are ready to faint because of the "heat and burden of the day," and therefore they flee to the shadow of this great Rock. They have renounced all pretensions to innate or self-acquired power to do any thing that is acceptable to God, and therefore from Him who is emphatically styled "*The Rock*," (Deut. xxxii. 4.) they have received a heart and will to begin the spiritual course, and to him they humbly approach for strength and ability daily imparted, to persevere in the same to their lives' end.

What, then, is the duty of such persons? "Let the inhabitants of the Rock *sing*:" let them always be joyful in the God of their salvation. But they do not always sing; they are not always joyful; and whence is the cause? It cannot arise from the ground of their dependence, for *that* is the immutable word and almighty power of the Most High; nor from their situation as inhabi-

tants of the Rock of Ages, for *that* is everlasting, unimpairable security ; nor from their experience of the character of God, for *that* bears unvarying testimony to the faithfulness of all his promises, and the unspeakable riches of his grace and mercy. It must result, then, from themselves, from their own folly, and sin, and unbelief. The Rock on which they are placed is a “strong Rock ;” the billows may dash and roar around it, but the eternal basis is unshaken ; its summit rises above the loftiest surges ; but through carelessness, and indifference, and worldly-mindedness, they often *look off* the Rock, and seeing the wild waves raging and foaming, they are giddy, and ready to lose their footing. Thus their hearts fail because of fear—however groundless ; and they are filled with lamentations—however unreasonable and inconsistent.

It is the duty and privilege of the believer *always* to “rejoice in the Lord,” to “rejoice evermore.” (Phil. iv. 4. 1 Thes. v. 16.) But, alas ! how many days are passed by him in sorrow and heaviness ! Is the Gospel still glad tidings ? or are its character and nature changed ? It remains like its Divine Author, “the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.” (Heb. xiii. 8.) Whence, then, is it, that among Christians of the present day, we hear so many sighs and groans of distress and despondency ? why do we see so much dulness and gloom ? Many seem

to be made unhappy, or at least uncomfortable by their religion. *True* religion cannot cause this ; it can never be the source of uneasiness. It is to be feared, that although a partial knowledge of the nature of the Gospel, and an imperfect faith in the promises of the Gospel, may produce much anxiety in the weak believer, and deprive him of much comfort ; yet that a conversation *unbecoming the Gospel*, laxity of principle, and sinful conformity to the world, have a large share in silencing the songs of the inhabitants of the Rock. ‘ A man may know too much of true religion to be happy without it, and yet act too inconsistently to enjoy its pleasures. Conscience and inclination are at variance ; and thus a worm as it were secretly gnaws his vitals, and a fixed melancholy pervades his mind.’*

True happiness must ever consist in a conformity to the Divine image ; and therefore outward circumstances have only just so much influence over our happiness and peace, as they succeed in superseding the power of faith and the authority of the Word of God. As to doubts and fears, they proceed in most cases from a neglect of self-examination, from a remissness in reading the Scriptures, and from the loss of the spirit of prayer. Where these three marks exhibit the proper features, the soul must prosper and be in health.—

* Wilson's Sermons.

Are we conscious that we have given up our whole heart to God? If this be done habitually, all the rest will be easy. How delightful to follow where the heart leads! And the heart is the first offering, the only acceptable one in Religion.—Many persons continue mourning a long time under doubts and fears, and lay all to the charge of *unbelief*, and cry out that they want *faith*; while at the same time the heart remains unexplored; and thus the hidden cause of their trouble lies undiscovered. If such persons possessed the peace which they desire, it would not be the fruit of true repentance, but of hardness of heart; if they enjoyed the hope which they wish for, it would be the result of presumption, not of faith. It is the consciousness of not having given ourselves to God, that makes us ashamed of putting our trust in Him. Faith is not so weak, but it is prevented in its exercise by worldly-mindedness. We profess to sorrow because the consolations of the Gospel are few and small to us; whereas the real cause of our concern is a conviction, that no man can serve God and Mammon. We are conscious of a divided heart, and therefore we reap all the bitter fruit of such a state of alienation.

If the Gospel be “glad tidings of great joy,” and if we understand and receive it according to its true nature and design, our minds must be filled with divine joy and satisfaction. It is the

glory of the Gospel above all other religious systems, that it brings peace and rest to the mind. The assurance which we possess that atonement has been made for sin, that God is reconciled, that he is our Friend, that the way to heaven is open to all, is calculated to fill the mind at all times with hope and with rejoicing. If we possess not this joy, the evil may be traced to ourselves. Either we are pursuing the world with undue ardour, and we neglect and undervalue Christian joy; or we grow remiss in Christian duties, and it is taken from us; or we lose it in the gratification of our corrupt and depraved desires.

Religion is regarded by too many persons as a restraint upon pleasure; they consider it as the enemy of enjoyment. But this is to mistake its true nature and design. It alone offers to us a true foundation of joy, by teaching us the right use of earthly pleasures; and leading us at the same time in the way to everlasting happiness. It is but a mournful pleasure to seize on the enjoyment of the world with hasty grasp, as so much good plucked from the hand of fate, which is about to close our life, and with it our happiness. It is but a delusive madness, which leads persons to say, "let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die;" (1 Cor. xv. 32.) as if there were no pleasure in the world, but what is sinful, and no hope of a better portion hereafter. The joy of the Christian is of a different character. He receives

and uses all the good things of this life, which are put into his hands, as gifts from his Heavenly Father; as designed to promote his comfort upon earth; as pledges of the care and love of God; and as motives to continual thanksgiving. He uses them with moderation, having found out the true secret of extracting all their sweets from earthly pleasures; and as looking for a far more valuable and an enduring portion in heaven. Whatever be his circumstances and condition in life, he can rejoice, having a source of joy which the world knows not of. In poverty, he rejoices in those true and abiding treasures, which are laid up for him in heaven. In sickness, he is cheered with the expectation of that "exceeding and eternal weight of glory," (2 Cor. iv. 17.) which shall succeed the "light affliction" of this present life. In weariness and trouble, he looks forward to that rest which "remaineth to the people of God." (Heb. iv. 9.) In death, his soul is filled with "joy unspeakable," in the expectation of that glory, when he shall be "caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and shall ever be with the Lord." (1 Thess. iv. 17.)

O God! shed abroad thy love in our hearts, and help us to walk in a perfect mind in thy statutes; for "great peace have they who love thy law!" Then shall we not be ashamed when we have respect unto all thy commandments. (Ps. cxix. 6. 165.)

THE REPENTANT BACKSLIDER.

AN acknowledgment of error is the mark of a well-disciplined mind, and must be the frequent result of a sincere inquiry after truth. Man being born both helpless and ignorant, must depend on the aid and instruction of others; and consequently his knowledge is subject to be both erroneous and imperfect, according to the source whence it is derived. His first principle of action being the impulse of his will and affections, it is of the greatest importance that his knowledge, which is to guide and restrain this active principle, should be obtained from that divine wisdom which maketh men "wise unto salvation." It is a great happiness to have the mind thus directed, in acquiring religious notions and in forming religious habits; that we may thereby be saved from a multitude of errors in sentiment, and much that is faulty in practice. When men derive their principles from corrupted sources, they have much trouble in after-life, if they are sincere and honest inquirers after truth, to correct them according to the standard of the word of God. Many notions, to which they were firmly wedded, are to be laid aside; many favourite sentiments

are to be discarded ; many opinions, against which the strongest prejudices once existed in their minds, are to be received ; much is to be conceded, that was once obstinately—rather than firmly-maintained ; and a vigorous and wholesome discipline is to be exercised over their conduct, restraining what is violent and headstrong, cutting off what is unworthy, and diligently supplying what is deficient.

When a man is either set right in his faith and practice from the commencement of his Christian course, or has arrived at the true standard by experience, he has the two-fold obligation of cleaving to that which is right, and of advancing in every thing that forms a part of the Christian character. The end of all true knowledge must be to promote a right practice ; and as we may make daily advances in our acquaintance with spiritual things, with the nature of our duties, the extent of our obligations, and the riches of divine grace, so we are bound by these very advances, to make correspondent progress in the faithful discharge of our duty, and in maintaining a conversation more influenced by our obligations, and more worthy of the divine grace and mercy manifested unto us. To advance thus in knowledge and practice daily, is the highest attainment of the Christian ; it cannot be done without hinderance or slackness, but it should be followed with that perseverance which makes head against

the corruptions of the heart, the stubbornness of the will, the waywardness of the affections, the enticements and snares of the world, and the temptations of our spiritual adversary. In no part of the Christian's life can he look back, and say, 'I am perfect: I have reached the summit of Christian attainment.' His condition on the earth, the law of his being, the nature of religion, all require progressive advancement, so long as he remains in this probationary state. Steadfastness of purpose is our only sure pledge of advancement. If we relax in the pursuit of religion, we cannot retain the ground which we have already gained. We must either advance or recede. The daily struggle of the Christian to "hold fast" that which he has received, is in fact an advancement in his career; for that which gives him power to retain, enables him also to proceed. To "stand fast" in the faith, is to receive an increase of faith; to be "steadfast," is to gain additional strength; to endure "unto the end," is to obtain eternal salvation: "For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end." (Heb. iii. 14.)

The Christian life is a race, where the prize is sure to all who strive with unremitted exertion: it is a combat, where the victory is certain to all who contend with firm and unyielding efforts. He that ceases to run in the Christian course, after having begun the career,—he that lays down

his spiritual weapons, after having commenced the warfare, is said to be a backslider. This term does not, however, apply to him who, surprised by the force of sudden and powerful temptation, loses sight for a moment of his obligations, and thus relaxes in his duty; but to him who has sunk into a state of habitual departure from holiness, and a daily renunciation of the fear of God. —In one sense, indeed, we may daily accuse ourselves of backsliding, for all our daily sins are departures from God; but he that is alive to the evil of his transgressions, and lives in the continual exercise of repentance, possesses the surest pledge of being preserved from falling away into perdition. The state most to be dreaded by the Christian, is one of indifference and unconcern. He that is careless whether he obtains the divine approbation, and is regardless whether his conduct be conformed to the divine will,—he that is satisfied with the “form” without the “power of godliness,” and that offereth to God a mere “bodily exercise,” for a spiritual service, is on the very edge of falling into open and wilful sin. For the distance is very small between unconcern for the will of God, and direct violation of that will,—between a disregard of the favour of God, and an open defiance of his displeasure.

To backslide implies some degree of previous religious attainment; for if men recede from the paths of God, they must have first made some

progress in those paths. Therefore the condition of a backslider is more fearful than of him who never knew the will of God ; inasmuch as the former violates more obligations than the latter. Men are commanded to acquaint themselves with God, and to serve and obey him ; and after they have attained to this knowledge, and begun to practise this obedience, they are thereby engaged not only to continue steadfast and to persevere, but to “ follow on to know the Lord,” to advance in the divine life, to “ grow in grace,” and to “ go on unto perfection.” To draw back, after having entered on the Christian course, is to testify to our own unworthiness of being made partakers of the heavenly inheritance ; for, said our Lord, “ No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God,” (Luke ix. 52.)—What, in fact, is the virtual language of him who turns “ from the holy commandment ;” but that the ways of wisdom are *not* ways of pleasantness, that her paths are *not* peace, that he repents of having renounced the world, the flesh, and the devil, is weary of the service of God, and prefers the slavery of sin, that the delight experienced by the Christian is delusive, and his hope vain, and that the hollow pleasures of the world are more to be desired !

It is in the very nature of sin, to lead to continued and more flagrant iniquity ; and a repetition of comparatively small sins, has a tendency to

hide from us the distinction between good and evil, and to harden our hearts in disobedience. In reference to this fact, how salutary are the apostolic warning and exhortation ; “ Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” (Heb. iii. 12, 13.) It is on this account that we should be on our ever-watchful guard against the first approaches to a backsliding state. The “ deceitfulness of sin” either hardens our heart against all conviction and humble acknowledgment of guilt, or it blinds our minds as to the real nature and extent of sin. When it operates in the former way, we have just cause to fear that a man is given over to judicial hardness of heart ; and when it discovers its influence in the latter mode, the man who is thereby deceived is fast approaching to a backsliding state. A decline in religious principle precedes open and wilful transgression. Either the habitual fear of God is laid aside, or the spirit of prayer decays, or the delight experienced in studying the Word of God is lost, previously to a careless and unholy conduct. Men cease to prove and examine themselves whether they continue in the faith, and thus faith becomes feeble, hope is weak, and divine consolations are at a low ebb ; and at length world-mindedness usurps the place of spirituality of affections ;

conformity to the vain and sinful desires of the flesh succeeds to a conscientious observance of all the divine will ; and a false delusive peace is taken up, instead of a “ conscience void of offence toward God and toward men.” (Acts xxiv. 16.)

The best way to keep alive religious impressions in the heart, is to examine ourselves frequently concerning our faith, our hope, and our practice. What is the nature of our faith in God,—in his person, as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,—in his perfections, as holy, just, true, as well as good, merciful, and patient,—in his will as demanding of us repentance and obedience ? What is the ground of our hope of acceptance and justification with God ;—to what are we looking, and on what are we relying, as a plea that will bear the scrutiny of God’s judgment-seat ? What is our conduct as influenced by this knowledge, this faith, this hope ? Are we striving to live agreeably to the relation in which we stand towards God, as our Creator, Governor, Preserver, and Judge,—towards Christ as our Redeemer,—towards the Holy Spirit, as our Sanctifier and Comforter,—and, lastly, towards each other as brethren and members of one common family ? These considerations furnish us with a touchstone to ascertain our spiritual character as Christians. They are easily understood, of evident application, and have a Scriptural sanction for their authority ; and while our faith and conduct will bear the test

of such an examination, we have the best security against falling into a backsliding state.

The path of the Christian is thickly beset with snares, and obstructed by difficulties. He has enemies within and without to weaken his steadfastness, and to draw him aside from the path of duty. He is in the world as a place of probation, wherein to be prepared for the enjoyment of the presence of God; but the world estranges his heart from those things, which tend to further this preparation. "The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," secretly insinuate themselves into the heart, and leave only formality for God. Even the comforts of life, things in themselves lawful and expedient, become snares and engross those affections which should be consecrated to divine things. Thus we are insensibly thrown off our guard, and give ourselves up to the pursuit of doubtful good, and at length to actual sin. Happy for us, if while thus in the path of danger, we are led to reflect on the error of our way, and to "ask for the old paths—the good way, and walk therein." (Jerem. vi. 16.) Happy for us, if our own wickedness correct us, and our backslidings reprove us, and we know and "see that it is an evil thing and bitter," that we have forsaken the Lord our God, and that his fear was not in us! (Jerem. ii. 19.) Happy for us, if, when we have found that "there is no peace unto the wicked," we

loathe our evil ways, and our departures from God, and with godly sorrow exclaim, "I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now." (Hosca ii. 7.)

Presumptuous confidence is the sure forerunner of laxity of conduct, if not of presumptuous sins. Trusting to our own supposed strength, we follow the world when its temptations, assuming an inviting form, address us as the Philistines did the son of Saul, "Come up to us, and we will show you a thing;" (1 Sam. xiv. 4.) but when we have gone over, we are not like him, victorious over our enemies, but fall before them.—We are too prone to think lightly of sin, notwithstanding all that the Scriptures declare of its being hateful to God, and destructive to the soul. We class iniquities, according to what we presume to be the estimate of their heinousness or venialness; and we fondly imagine that *our* sins are of the latter class. We are ingenious in inventing excuses for some pleasing iniquity, some darling transgression; and thus our depravity increases the natural deceitfulness of sin. We either endeavour to still the voice of conscience, by persuading ourselves that the easily-besetting sin is but a small thing, or that it is of an indifferent nature, scarcely, if at all, partaking of the nature of guilt. Or, if our violation of duty be too glaring to be thus explained away, or our conscience be too sensible to allow it to pass without some alarming

fears—some keen remorse, we are yet exposed to another and more dangerous wile of Satan, that of perverting the grace of God to licentiousness; and by entertaining false notions of the liberty of the Gospel, of promising ourselves freedom from what we call scrupulous fears and superstitious bondage; while at the same time, we are “the servants of corruption,” and the slaves of sin; “for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.” (2 Pet. ii. 19.) Alas! “there is no slavery like sin; nor any liberty like the service of God.” We are deceived by the outward aspect of temptations; we grasp the flower, fair in appearance and promising durability; but it perishes in our hand, and the thorn only remains. We drink of the cup, which our imagination represents as of unmingled sweetness; but we discover in the end that death is in the potion.

Different situations and a change of outward circumstances, often draw forth from our hearts many sinful affections and passions, which we did not before suspect to be there. Many, while in humble stations in life, have said, and with sincerity, “Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty.” (Ps. cxxxi. 1.) But when they have been advanced in worldly consideration, they have discovered in their lives, pride, oppression, arrogance.—When God has accomplished for us a signal deliverance from trouble, we are

ready to say, ' We will trust in him as long as we live : ' but, alas ! the first recurrence of difficulty revives our unbelief. Apprehended danger and sorrow cause us to forget former mercies, and we cease to " hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." Have we been afflicted ? While it continued we were serious and thoughtful, circumspect and humble ; we put our " mouth in the dust." But when it was removed, did we not become trifling and full of levity ? Did not the removal of danger, lead also to an abatement in the fervour of our prayers, to a decrease of watchfulness, to a declension in the spirit of devotion, to a weakening of the habits of piety, and an infringement on, if not a total breaking up of our religious services ? O, let us, then, go and return to our first husband ; for then was it better with us than now !

Again—Affliction has sometimes a contrary effect, and is made an occasion of hard thoughts against God ; if not of actual murmurings and disobedience. When the Israelites were passing through the wilderness, at every new difficulty which they encountered, they spake of making themselves another leader, and of returning into Egypt ; but on delivery from the trouble, they readily joined in singing praises to the God of their salvation ; and, as readily returned to murmuring and unbelief, at the recurrence of trial.—Is not this a picture of our own conduct ? Have

we never preferred returning to the slavery of sin and Satan, instead of persevering in the service of God? While we are in health, and worldly prosperity shines upon us, our faith is unshaken, because untried; we can then speak of God as our Shepherd, and say "In him will we trust." Like David we say in our prosperity, "We shall never be moved:" (Psalm xxx. 6.) but when it pleases the Almighty to hide his face, then we are troubled. No sooner does he try us with the bitter waters of affliction, than we murmur at his righteous dispensations, and are ready to call in question his love to our souls; if not his wisdom and justice. We first cast away our strength by repining and fretfulness, and then complain of the weakness of our faith; and thus departures from God lead to unbelief, and unbelief, if persisted in, confirms us in our backsliding state; till at length we are in danger of falling into hardened indifference, or hopeless despair.

God is willing to receive us again to his favour, on our sincere repentance. We should know that where sin abounds, grace does much more abound; (Rom. v. 21.) not that we should think lightly of sin, or continue therein, but that we may repent, and enjoy a cheering hope of forgiveness. We glorify God by believing that he is willing to save us, that his Gospel is a free offer of pardon and salvation to the whole human race—to every individual of mankind, and that

the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin.—Although the Gospel excludes despair, yet it calls to repentance, as the only way in which we can return to God with acceptance. ‘The Gospel humbles whom it justifies, and comforts those that were condemned; it abases more than the law, but without despair; it advances more than nature could, but without presumption.’* Despair is the strong-hold of Satan. He first entices men to sin, with a presumptuous reliance on the great mercy of God; and then terrifies them with accusations of the flagrancy of their guilt, and with dread of the impossibility of pardon and salvation. His power is truly called, the power of darkness. Dark and deceitful are his numerous wiles and artifices; and dark and dreadful is the state of mind, into which he brings the despairing sinner, who has given himself up resistless to his suggestions and influence! Let us, then, go to the “Father of lights,” whose presence Satan must ever flee, and beseech him to banish darkness from our minds, to deliver our hearts from unbelief, and to cause us to say, with the language and feelings of penitence and hope, “I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now.”

The tendency of a backsliding state, is to harden the heart against repentance. Instead of

* Dr. Bates.

inquiring whence he has fallen, and endeavouring to retrace his steps into the narrow way whence he has deviated, the backslider too often tries to number up what evidences he can, of being yet in the favour of God, and in the way of salvation. He begins to calculate how much compliance with the world is consistent with safety ; and how far he can go in sin, without incurring the risk of everlasting perdition. He takes comfort from his former faith, instead of bewailing his present unbelief ; he looks with complacency on his former good works, instead of forsaking his present evil deeds. Conscience accuses him of having left his first love, and that he no longer labours for Christ's name's sake, but faints and is weary of well-doing ; (Rev. ii. 4.) and to justify his declensions, he begins to talk of being dead to the law, of the electing and unchanging love of God, and of the final perseverance of believers. But if he rightly understood the grace of God, he would find in it the strongest inducements to make his calling and election sure ; not by vainly presuming on the secret purposes of God, but by " denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts," and living " soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." (Titus ii. 12.) " It is a mortal delusion for any one to pretend that electing mercy will bring them to glory, although they indulge themselves in a course of sin. There cannot be the least ground of a rational, just hope in any per-

son, without holiness; "every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself." (1 John iii. 3.) By which it appears that the genuine and proper use we are to make of the "exceeding great and precious promises," is "that by these," we "might be partakers of the divine nature," and escape the "corruption that is in the world through lust."* (2 Pet. i. 4.)

The delusion of which we are now speaking, is most to be dreaded of all the evils which attend a state of backsliding from God; because it debases the understanding, as well as hardens the heart. It perverts the Gospel, and extracts poison from that which was given to be a remedy. It converts the grounds of pardon into the means of condemnation; and brings down the heavy sentence of perdition, from the very source of redemption and salvation.—The power of God can alone deliver from this delusion; the divine Spirit can alone remove this veil from the mind. And when a man is again convinced by divine teaching, that "faith without works is dead;" that the true use of the blood of Christ, is to cleanse from sin; that the love of God is the most powerful inducement to hate and deny all ungodliness; and that the grace of God imparts sanctification, as well as confers pardon;—when his conscience hears the voice of him who is the "first and the

* Dr. Bates.

last," saying unto him, "Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works;" (Rev. ii. 5.) then his heart is melted, and yields to the warning voice; he confesses his iniquity with shame and sorrow; he loathes his former ways; and, encouraged by that love which has produced repentance in his heart, he turns his back on his sins, and looks again towards God's holy temple, (Jonah ii. 4.) saying "I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now."

There are many questionable cases connected with a state of alienation from God. The way to God is open by faith and repentance; but in the case of some persons, we can neither feel a good hope for them ourselves, nor give them encouragement to indulge such a hope. Suppose the case of a man advanced in years, and about to die; his early life was devoted to God, but he soon broke the ties of religion, and spent the remainder of his years in uninterrupted transgression, living worse than an infidel. When we witness the latter end of such a character, and behold the force of conscience combined with the terrors of death; and hear him crying for pardon, yet not daring to hope for it; earnestly seeking consolation, yet afraid to embrace it, lest it should prove a delusion; we are doubtful what course to pursue. The difficulty of ascertaining whether a death-bed repentance, is the result of a sincere, heart-felt

sorrow for sin, and grief for having offended the God of all mercies ; or the mere effect of fear, arising from the dreaded approach of the king of terrors and the hour of judgment, prevents us from offering, and him from receiving the comfort that sinking nature so much needs at that awful period.

What can be said to such a character ? The Gospel must be set before him in all its freeness, and fulness, and suitableness to the condition of mankind. But whether he rightly receives it, or safely relies on it, must remain a question with survivors ; and to himself also it is a subject of painful doubt. Sincere repentance is never too late ; but where is the evidence that late repentance—repentance deferred till the hour of mortality, is sincere ! Being conscious that while life and strength were possessed in vigour, God was forgotten, his word was contemned, his ministers were derided, and the day of grace was wasted, the dying sinner feels how doubtful is the acceptance with God of the brief remains of an ill-spent life. He fears, and justly too, lest that mercy which he slighted for many years, should be denied to the earnest supplication of the last hour of ebbing life ! He trembles lest that divine wrath which he despised while health bounded in his veins, should be ready at the moment of dissolution, to fall on his guilty soul to the very uttermost. It is in vain we assure him that

the mercy of God endureth for ever, that his grace reigns and abounds, and that Christ died to save us from the wrath to come; the knowledge of these truths has been long familiar to him, but instead of making them the strongest incitements to hate and avoid evil, he perverted them into encouragements to walk after the desires of the flesh. And now when he should be resting his everlasting well-being on these encouraging and consoling doctrines of the Gospel, he fears lest his former abuse of them, as it adds aggravation to his sins, should also confirm the sentence of his irrevocable condemnation!

And when a contrary effect is witnessed, as is sometimes the case, and we hear the man who has lived without God in the world, speaking of the glories of heaven as his undoubted inheritance, and expressing the strongest assurance that his sins are pardoned, and his faith accepted; we have very good reason to suspect the origin of such assurance. It seems to be a notion with some persons, that full assurance of pardon is essential to true faith, and that a death-bed, without this assurance, is destitute of the best evidence of our being in a state of acceptance with God. It is, doubtless, very desirable to have a comfortable and well-grounded expectation of heaven, when we are on the point of leaving the present scene: but when we hear of persons whose life has been one continued violation of the laws

of God and man,—persons suffering as malefactors the extreme sentence of the law on the scaffold, who nevertheless profess to have that strong faith, and to enjoy that full tide of consolation, which are not possessed by many sincere and humble Christians, whose whole life has been both pious and useful; we may, we ought to suspect that such persons are under a powerful and fatal delusion.

We know that the judgment of God, in such cases, will be according to truth; but we are not to presume to exercise it. It is not our province to limit the mercy of God, or to set bounds to his grace. Christ has promised that he will in no-wise cast out any that come unto him; and it is beyond our sphere, to decide who exceeds the period of gracious reception. It is much more delightful to have the testimony of Scripture on our side, when we confidently assure those, whose consciences accuse them of many departures from God, but who have long felt true contrition, and have sincerely desired to please God, that they may be encouraged to make an immediate and successful application to the Throne of Grace.—Is there any humble, sincere, but timorous Christian, who is not made so perfect in love, as to rise above that slavish fear which hath torment; and who unnecessarily trembles at the dreaded apprehension of being rejected on account of many imperfections? Let

such a one take courage, and adopt the language of the prophet, saying "When I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me." (Micah vii. 8.) To such a one we may apply the consolatory words spoken to the church of old, "O, thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted;" I will take out of thy hand "the cup of trembling, thou shalt no more drink it again;" "Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be thy everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended." (Isa. li. 22—liv. 11—lx. 20.)

PASSION OF CHRIST.

IT is universally admitted that religion, or the care of the soul—a due concern for spiritual welfare, a proper consideration of the relation in which we stand towards God, and of the duties which devolve on us in consequence of that relation,—it is admitted by all that *religion* ought to be the chief object of man's attention and regard ; inasmuch as the soul infinitely surpasses the body in value, and eternity outweighs, in an immeasurable degree, the passing and transitory objects of this temporal state.—But do we find this universal admission generally acted upon ? Do we find men—we do not say neglecting the concerns of this life, for the interests of eternity ; for religion neither commands nor sanctions such a perversion of moral duty,—but do we find men living and acting as those who believe that they have important duties of an earthly character to discharge, and duties vastly more important of a spiritual nature, which demand their best affections and their devoted service ;—that they have bodily wants to be supplied by active diligence and industry, and spiritual necessities of louder call, which can only be removed by the grace and mercy of heaven ;—that they have social interests

and civil duties to be regarded and discharged towards their fellow men, and at the same time, duties of more imperious obligation towards God their Creator, their Preserver, their Judge, and interests of surpassing consequence and value in the unseen world? Do we find these happy results, from an admission so generally and so readily made by all? Both candour and charity authorise us to answer, No.—Not only we do not observe the obligations of religion submitted to as of chief authority; but we daily see a prevalent, an habitual disregard of these obligations.

Religion makes but little general impression; that is, so as to manifest its influence over the affections and the conduct of men. The divine testimony concerning mankind, from the time of the introduction of sin, is that their thoughts are evil, that their heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, and that they have gone out of the way of holiness and obedience. It is unconcern about spiritual good, which forms the most lamentable feature in the character of fallen and depraved man. Sin places him in danger of the judgment of God, but he is regardless of the perils which are only threatened and not inflicted. The mercy of God has provided for him a Saviour, but he feels small interest in a salvation which engages to deliver him from the dominion of those sins which he loves,—to give him a new heart and a right spirit, for which he feels no wish,—and to

bestow on him a future happiness which is pure and lasting, but for which, as he is conscious of no earnest and longing desires, so he makes no preparation. The present scene occupies his chief attention, his inquiries pass not the limits of this earthly globe ; here his heart seeks its pleasure, and here his affections grovel, heedless of the supreme "fulness of joy," and the unspeakable glories which the long-suffering and the grace of God constantly hold out to his pursuit, and press upon him as his chief concern, as alone worthy of his unremitted exertions.

Experience and the Bible both confirm this statement of the moral condition of mankind. The very provision that is made to cherish and keep alive the principle of religion, proves the tendency which there is in the human heart to forget or neglect it. The observance of the Lord's day is designed to remind men of their Creator, the only true God and Lord ; the duty of prayer is intended to awaken a just sense of our necessities and our dependence, to preserve humility, to increase faith, and to produce hope ; the obligation to thanksgiving tends to maintain in lively exercise a feeling of our infinite obligations to our Heavenly Father, and to lead us to acknowledge him in all our ways ; the command to "search the Scriptures," is given that we might have always before us, the condition into which we are fallen as sinners, and the redemp-

tion that is provided for us, in the mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ.—Hard must that heart be, which requires such affecting displays of mercy to incline and melt it; depraved must those affections be, which need such appeals to allure them; obstinate must that will be, which calls for such powerful and such constant reason and argument to bow and regulate it! But such, truly, is our heart; such are human affections; such is man's will!

The indifference and unconcern of men are not confined to the salvation which regards their own benefit alone, but they extend also to the Saviour—him who died to purchase this salvation. Hence we may suppose the moving remonstrance of the Saviour, anticipated in prophetic declaration, as applicable to them. “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?” As if it were said, If ye have no attention to be bestowed on your own advantage, no regard for your chief blessings, at least let your sympathy be excited in my behalf,—at least let your pity and love be moved on my account,—have some consideration for my sufferings as personal, if not as borne for your sakes,—overlook not the innocence of my character, the nature of my office, the dignity of my person! “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow!” (Lam. i. 12.)

Let us, then, instead of “passing by” as un-

concerned spectators of so wondrous a scene as the suffering of the Son of God, endeavour to make some inquiry respecting the nature and the design of the sorrow which Christ endured in his state of humiliation.

The sorrow of Christ was unlike any other human misery, not because of the extremity of bodily suffering on the cross, for this did not exceed (as we may suppose,) the pain endured by others, who were subjected to this mode of punishment; but his sorrow was peculiar in being borne for others, in being the sorrow inflicted by divine justice upon him as the sinner's Surety, and in partaking more of a spiritual than a corporeal nature. We do not design to underrate the bodily tortures which our Lord suffered, or the ignominy to which he submitted in being crucified. The circumstances which are related in history of the mode of putting persons to death, by fixing them to a cross, sufficiently prove it to have been a most painful and agonizing manner of inflicting the sentence of death. "Crucifixion was a punishment which the antients inflicted only on the most notorious criminals and malefactors. The cross was made of two beams, either crossing at the top at right angles, or in the middle of their length like the letter X. There was, besides, a piece on the centre of the transverse beam, to which was attached the accusation, or statement of the culprit's crime; together with

a piece of wood that projected from the middle, on which the person sat as on a kind of saddle, and by which the whole body was supported. Justin Martyr gives this description; and it is worthy of note that he lived in the former part of the second century of the Christian æra, before the punishment of the cross was abolished.”—“Crucifixion is one of the most cruel and excruciating deaths, which the art of ingeniously tormenting and extinguishing life ever devised. The body of the criminal was fastened to the upright beam by nailing or tying the feet to it, and on the transverse beam by nailing or sometimes tying the hands to it. As the nerves are the instruments of all sensation or feeling, wounds in the parts where they most abound, must be peculiarly painful; especially when inflicted with such rude instruments as large nails, forcibly driven through the exquisitely delicate tendons, nerves, and bones of those parts. The horror of this punishment will appear, when it is considered that the person was permitted to hang (the whole weight of his body being borne up by his nailed hands and feet, and by the projecting piece in the middle of the cross,) until he perished through agony and want of food. There are instances of crucified persons living in this exquisite torture several days. The wise and adorable Author of our being, has framed and constituted the fabric of our bodies in such a merciful man-

ner, that nothing violent is lasting. Friendly death sealed the eyes of those wretches generally in two days. Hunger, thirst, and acute pain dismissed them from their intolerable sufferings.”*

But this was not all the torture inflicted on those who were crucified. “Among the Romans, scourging was always inflicted previously to crucifixion.” After they had mangled and torn the body of Jesus with this customary flagellation, “the Evangelist informs us that they obliged our Lord to carry to the place of execution the cross on which he was to be suspended. This was usual. Lacerated, therefore, with the stripes and bruises he had received, faint with the loss of blood, his spirits exhausted by the cruel insults and blows that were given him when they invested him with robes of mock royalty, and oppressed with the incumbent weight of the cross;—in these circumstances, our Saviour was urged along the road.”†

In stating the nature of Christ’s sufferings, it is necessary to dwell more particularly on their spiritual nature, as endured for men; because it is to be feared that many persons are satisfied with their feelings on this point; because on reading or hearing of the bodily anguish which Christ endured on the Cross, they are moved to tears and sympathizing pity. Such pity may be altogether independent of religious feeling; it may

* Horne’s Introd. vol. iii. p. 150. † Ib. p. 155. et seq.

be excited by any instance of human misery, and yet not in any way affect or influence the conduct. Many are moved to tears at the mere representation of feigned distress on the Stage, who have no compassion, that is, no active benevolence to allay or remove the actual wants and sufferings of their poor and distressed neighbours. We must guard against a spurious sensibility, a false kind of tenderness; we must examine our hearts and affections, and see how far in relation to our brethren of mankind, our compassion proves itself to be of the right kind, by urging us to acts of charity and deeds of benevolence. And in spiritual things we should make diligent inquiry, how far our sorrow for a suffering and dying Saviour leads us to bewail the *cause* of his sufferings and death, namely, *our sins*; and how far this repentance is succeeded by a forsaking of our evil ways—the only sure evidence of godly sorrow and repentance unto life. Much compassion may be manifested at the recital of a tale of woe, but no stretching forth of the arm to succour the distressed object, no opening of the hand to bestow the means of assistance. Many tears may be shed on hearing of the sufferings of Christ, but no true repentance be felt, no lively faith be exercised, no saving knowledge be acquired of the true nature and the grand design of those sufferings.

The true nature of Christ's sufferings may be

ascertained from the dignity of his person, and from the causes which led to them. "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor." (2 Cor. viii. 9.) It was great condescension in him to assume human nature ; how much greater to accomplish by sufferings what was necessary for our redemption ! Christ took not on him our first and original nature, which was both free from sin and exempt from sorrow of every kind. Although he was pure, and spotless, and "separate from sinners ;" yet he took upon him our nature in all its weakness, and as exposed to every suffering incident to mortality. The title given to him in prophecy, "a man of sorrows," was not without emphatical signification ; for nearly his whole life was one continual suffering. He said of himself that he must "suffer many things ;" (Luke xvii. 25.) and accordingly he was poor and houseless, his life was constantly sought for by his bitter enemies, he was reviled and traduced, he endured the "contradiction of sinners against himself?" (Heb. xii. 3.) In the agony in the garden previously to his death, his soul was exceedingly sorrowful and heavy, even to produce the gushing forth of great drops of blood ; and in his last passion he hid not his face from shame and from spitting, and at length was held up on the Cross as hated of man and accursed of God ! If a good man could have been found—one with-

out sin, to endure all this for his fellow-men, it would have been a noble instance of love ;—if an angel from heaven had descended to endure it, we should have been still more struck with the magnitude of the compassion felt for us ;—how is it, then, that we feel so little emotion, when we are assured that he who was King of kings, and Lord of lords, the Mighty God, took upon him for our sakes the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross !

The causes which led to the sorrow of Christ also show its nature, and that no sorrow was ever like his sorrow. The evil of sin and the anger of God could alone be removed and appeased by the suffering and death of the Son of God. On account of the evil of sin, the sorrow of Christ surpassed our knowledge. We may readily believe that sin is an infinite evil, as being committed against a God whose perfections are all infinite ; but we cannot estimate the suffering necessary to atone for sin—for the sins of the whole world.—If the sorrow felt for the commission of sin be exceedingly keen, when guilt is deeply impressed on the conscience of man, what must have been the sorrow of Him who became a sin-offering for the transgressions of all mankind ! If the mere apprehension of the wrath of God on account of sin, be so dreadful to the awakened sinner, what must have been the full weight of that wrath, which fell upon the head of him on

whom was laid the iniquity of us all! How dreadful must that anger have been, which caused the Saviour, when his hour drew nigh to endure it, to pray with agonizing fervour, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me!" (Matt. xxvi. 39.) Who can understand the full meaning of those words, uttered by the dying Saviour, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!" Surely, he who uttered them, then bore the weight of God's just displeasure against sin; surely, he was then deprived of all sense of the favour of God, and was separated from the only fountain of joy and happiness.

Let us consider the design of the sorrow which Christ endured.

"Without shedding of blood is no remission;" (Heb. ix. 22.) and without remission or forgiveness of sins, there can be no salvation. Our Saviour, then, "gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." (Titus ii. 14.) The design of Christ's suffering was that we might be pardoned, and sanctified, and prepared for the heavenly glory. Unless he had intervened between God and us with his perfect work of mediation, we could never have seen the face of God but as an angry Judge, to condemn us to endless banishment from his presence. There are but two ways of appearing before God with acceptance, either innocent,

or as clothed with the imputed righteousness of Christ. That we are intirely excluded from the former mode of access, needs no proof; all are agreed respecting the universal guilt of mankind, although they may differ concerning its degree. And the latter could not be obtained without the humiliation and suffering of Christ to atone for sin. The impassable barrier which precluded the access of man to God, was sin; this has been removed by the Mediator, and thus we “who sometimes were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ.” He hath reconciled us unto God by the Cross, and “through him we have access unto the Father.” (Eph. ii. 13, 16, 18.) If we propose any other way of approach unto God, than this “new and living way,” which Christ hath “consecrated for us,” (Heb. x. 20.) we shall find ourselves at last in the situation of him who intruded into the royal feast, without a garment appropriated to the festive occasion. Of such a one will the King of kings say, “Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matt. xxii. 11—13.)

If Christ died to atone for sin, then is sin most to be dreaded as our greatest enemy. If the wrath of God against sin caused the Saviour to be “sore amazed,” how shall mortal man endure that wrath! Shall we sin with careless presumption, as those who choose to risk the endless suf-

fering of that which almost overwhelmed the Redeemer! If innocence shrunk back at the apprehension of the cup of God's wrath, what shall guilty men do, who live in wilful sin, and die in impenitence! Can they "dwell with devouring fire?" Can they "dwell with everlasting burnings?" Can they "lie down in sorrow"—that sorrow which drew from the Son of God the affecting cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!"

Sanctification, which includes a preparation for the heavenly glory, is another part of the design of the sorrow which Christ endured. The pardon of sin implies not only that full satisfaction has been made to divine justice, but also that the objects of this pardon are expected to live henceforth in a constant state of watchfulness and prayer that they fall not into temptation, and so return to habitual and wilful sin. Accordingly, divine strength is offered to them; whereby they may be enabled to overcome all their spiritual adversaries. They are exhorted to "put on the whole armour of God, that they may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil,"—(Eph. vi. 11.) the wiles of him whose works Christ came to destroy.—It is a fatal delusion for any one to suppose that the pardon of sin affords any warrant for continuing to indulge the lusts of flesh, or that the grace of God, which abounds much more than sin, permits us to "continue in sin,

that grace may abound." (Rom. vi. 1.) They who can think or speak lightly of sin, show manifestly that they have never been impressed with a knowledge of its evil nature, and have never sought its pardon through the only medium of forgiveness. They who ignorantly think to magnify the grace of God, by carelessly continuing in those sins for which Christ died, and for which grace offers pardon, do "crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh," and do "despite unto the Spirit of grace." (Heb. vi. 6.—x. 25.) By hardened impenitence, and by obstinate perseverance in sin, they set aside, as far as in them lies, the merits of Christ's death, and require, as it were, a fresh crucifixion, a renewal of that offering which was *once* made, and which can never be repeated; "for by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." (Heb. xi. 28.) "If we sin wilfully," preservingly, habitually, and maliciously, "after that we have received the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins." (Heb. x. 14.) Let not any one, then, thus trample under foot the Son of God, "for we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me,"—and "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!" (Heb. x. 29—31.)

If we rightly consider the nature, and understand the design of Christ's sufferings, how can we pass by with hard indifference in a course of sin, regardless of his sorrow, and of that love

which prompted him to bear it for our sakes! Alas! with lamentable disregard of our true welfare, we care but little for the pardon of sin, a new heart, and a right spirit, so that we can but obtain the gratification of our corrupt and depraved desires. We set small value on the durable riches of Christ's righteousness, so that we can but procure worldly riches and honours. We have but little desires for the joys of heaven, so that we can but continue to live in this world.—The most prevailing inducements unite to call on men to give their chief regard and attention to the welfare of the soul. If the terrors of a just and holy law,—if the majesty of God,—if the severity of divine justice, cannot induce us to renounce our iniquities; at least the sufferings of him who loved us even unto death, should move us to shed the tears of true repentance, and to feel a perfect hatred of those sins, for which Christ suffered, and bled, and died! Shall not our hearts relent, when blessings are offered us, for the purchase of which our Saviour endured the curse! Shall we not resolve to renounce all iniquity, seeing Christ died that it might be pardoned! Did Christ leave the celestial abodes, that a way might be opened from earth to heaven; and shall we not endeavour to walk in this way, and to attain to endless happiness and glory! O! what a contrast is exhibited in the means of human redemption, and the objects of that redemption! We be-

hold guilty sinners, and a holy, spotless sacrifice ; a world in rebellion, and God their Maker beseeching them to be reconciled to him ! We see divine love, and human enmity ; a Spirit of grace, and obstinate depravity ; long-suffering patience, and determined continuance in provocations !

Let this amazing contrast humble us to the lowest self-abasement, and cover us with the shame of sincere repentance ; let it prepare and incline our hearts to listen to the threatenings of divine justice, and the invitations of divine mercy ; and above all, let it prevail on us to love with undivided affections, and to serve with unremitted obedience, that Saviour who maketh this most affecting appeal to our hearts, " Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by ? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow ! "

THE POWER AND GLORY OF CHRIST.

THE knowledge of salvation by a Mediator, is as antient as the fall of man. In the sentence which justice pronounced on the guilty inhabitants of Paradise, Mercy triumphed in the gracious promise which was added, that from the seed of the woman should arise a Deliverer, who should bruise the head of the serpent. (Gen. iii. 15.) When God manifested his power in the creation of mankind, he displayed also the goodness which is essential to his divine nature; every thing which he made was not only good in itself, as to beauty of appearance, and perfectness of formation, but also good in relation to its usefulness to man. The glory of God and the advantage of his creatures, were united in all the works of the great Creator. Our first parents worshipped God, as a Being of infinite wisdom, and power, and goodness, and love; they knew not his anger or displeasure; they had not witnessed the operations of his justice as displayed in the maintenance of the honour of divine law. And after sin had entered into the world, the earliest revelation which we have of the character and designs of our Maker, is a declaration of his mercy towards

the human race. The sentence which was denounced against Adam, would at once have driven him to despair had not the promise of mercy excited hope in his breast. All the evils, moral and natural, which would result from the Fall, must have been known to God, and we cannot, therefore, avoid the inference, that the provision which his tender mercy made for the restoration of his guilty and wretched creatures, would eventually deliver them both from present suffering, and from final condemnation. And accordingly, the promise in which this provision of divine mercy was made known to man, was so expressed that the expectation of an almighty Deliverer, who should again exalt the children of men to the high dignity and favour whence they had fallen through sin, was so powerfully excited, and the knowledge of the nature and design of his mission so clearly understood, and so generally diffused, that the Redeemer was emphatically called in prophecy, "The desire of all nations." (Hag. ii. 7.)

However this knowledge may have declined in after-ages, in consequence of the universal corruption of mankind, it was never intirely lost; nor was it exclusively confined to the people of Israel, who were the chosen depositaries of true religion. The expectation of a heavenly Deliverer was found in some degree among all nations, although much obscured and perverted by

gross idolatry and depravity. No great moral or natural event, which in its consequences affects the whole human race, can be altogether forgotten, and the remembrance of it obliterated from the earth. If a tradition of the deluge, a judgment which was likely to make the strongest impression on the minds of the few survivors, be found, as is the fact, among all nations of the earth ; can we suppose that the knowledge of the fall, and of the promised restoration—events of infinitely greater importance than the destruction of one intire generation of men, could be totally lost from among mankind ? Some traces of an acquaintance with both may be found even among the most barbarous people. The universal notion of the necessity and efficacy of sacrifice, can be traced to no other origin. The custom of offering sacrifices was of divine authority ; and we learn from the Scriptures, that it was designed to keep alive the expectation of a Messiah, who should offer the sacrifice of himself as an atonement for a guilty world, and to direct the faith of the worshippers to him as the great propitiatory sacrifice, which alone could take away sin ; and of which their own offerings of obedience and faith, were but types and shadows. The sacrifice of Abel was of this kind, and was therefore accepted of God ; while that of Cain was rejected, because in it there was no type of the future Redeemer ; it was an offering of disobedience, and not of faith ;

it was not of the kind prescribed by divine command; and it was not designed by the offerer to have a propitiatory reference, but evidently as a meritorious performance.

The knowledge that God had thoughts of mercy towards mankind, was communicated as soon as the circumstances of the case required; that is, immediately after the entrance of sin. But the method by which redemption was to be procured, was gradually developed in succeeding ages, by the ministrations of the prophets. And although some of their predictions respecting the Messiah, were obscure, being designed to be explained only by the accomplishment of the events, yet the Personage who was to appear as the Deliverer, the manner of his birth and manifestation to the world, the lowliness of his appearance, and the wonderful works which he should perform, were so circumstantially described, that all who truly waited for the consolation of Israel, were prepared to acknowledge Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah. The holy Simeon blessed God for the sight of the infant Saviour; and desired to depart this life when he had beheld him, who was destined to be a “a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Israel.” (Luke ii. 29—32.)

It is true that the majority, even of his brethren of Israel, were offended at the Redeemer; because they misinterpreted the prophecies, and looked for temporal glories, where God designed

spiritual blessings. They knew by what names of dignity the Messiah would be known ; but they wilfully resisted the evidence which Christ gave in proof that to him all these names belonged.—The Gentiles also, in the land where our Lord was born, and where he sojourned, refused to make any inquiry into the case ; they held both the Jews and the Messiah, who was born of their nation, in the greatest contempt ; and although Pilate declared that he found no fault in him, yet he delivered him up to death, at the request of his malicious enemies.

The Jews expected that the Messiah was to be *their* Deliverer, as a nation ; and not the general Saviour of mankind. They looked for a Prince with the power and glory of this world, to raise their nation to an unknown height of grandeur and dominion. But as God designed mercy, through the Messiah, to all nations, he sent his Son in that character which best declared that the merits of his mediation, were intended for the whole human race ; and not for any one people in particular. The antient prophets who foretold the coming of the Redeemer, understood that his kingdom was to be a spiritual one ; and as the condition of the world was one in which men were exposed to everlasting ruin, they looked for a Deliverer whose salvation should not be temporal, but eternal. If temporal deliverance only had been required for the human race, this might

have been effected by a human agent, vested with extraordinary power from God for the occasion ; but when atonement for sin was to be made, when divine justice was to be satisfied—divine wrath to be appeased—divine truth to be justified—divine mercy to be manifested, and eternal life bestowed, the case demanded the aid of an Almighty arm, the interposition of a divine Personage.—Accordingly, the promises distinctly describing this Personage, ascribed to him the union of divinity and humanity. He was to be born of woman, as are all those whom he came to save ; he was to be exposed to sorrow and grief, as are all those whose cause he undertook ; he was to die, as do all for whom he came to procure everlasting life. But, his nature was also to be divine ; his names were to be those of Deity ; his works were to be such as omnipotence alone could effect ; his spiritual kingdom was to be without end ; and his exaltation was to be the glory peculiar to the Eternal God alone. In all these things he was to be called “ Wonderful :”—(Isa. ix. 6.) in his nature—his state of humiliation—the display of his power—his love to man, even unto death—the final judgment of mankind, and in the everlasting redemption of all who believe in him.

Jesus Christ is rightly named “ Wonderful,” if we contemplate the dignity of his nature, in conjunction with his state of humiliation on earth.

It has always been a prevalent notion among

mankind, that God might be propitiated : but the glory of displaying the means by which this propitiation was to be effected, belonged alone to God. The mercy which God designed to bestow on man, was wonderful in degree ; but the means by which it was to be purchased, were still more wonderful. That God should send a Deliverer, was made known in the first promise of mercy : but that the Deliverer should be the “ Mighty God,” and that he should appear as a frail, mortal man, subject to all the sufferings incident to humanity, surpassed the utmost expectation of man, and the comprehension of created intelligence. Unless this surprising truth had been most explicitly declared in the Word of God, it would never have entered our minds to suppose it ; nor should we have dared to believe it, if propounded to us by any authority less than divine. The union of the divine and human natures is the great “ mystery of godliness ;” we have clear evidence of its existence, although the nature of it must be inexplicable to our finite understanding. —We might suppose that such a fact would always excite in our minds the liveliest feelings of devout admiration, and that we should love to meditate on a truth so glorious in its consequences to us, and so fraught with wonders in every part of its manifestation. But the fact is so often stated to us, and the acknowledgment and belief of it so often repeated by us, that it ceases to

excite in our minds those feelings of grateful adoration, which so wonderful a truth is calculated to produce; and which it does produce in the minds of beings of a higher order than ourselves. We read that "the angels desire to look" into these things. (1 Pet. i. 12.) We derive all the benefits which result from them; and we are the first to suffer familiarity with them, to produce indifference: and because we have always known that the child born unto us, as the promised Messiah, was the "Mighty God," we look upon so wonderful a truth with little emotion.

It is a subject which demands our constant grateful recollection, because it is the only sure foundation for our hope of pardon. If we build our reliance on a created arm, we must be eventually covered with confusion; because the Scriptures declare that God is our Saviour, and he will not give his glory to another. Those who unhappily rely on a Mediator that is but a man, trust in a Saviour of their own invention, and not in the Saviour of the Scriptures.—If Christ be not very God, then is the language of prophecy false, for it declared that he should be called "the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father." (Isa. ix. 6.) If Christ be not very God, his claims were profane and sacrilegious invasions of the prerogatives of the Eternal, for he said "I and my Father are one." (John x. 30.) If Christ be not God, the faith of the Apostles was blasphemy,

for they declared that "God was manifest in the flesh." (1 Tim. iii. 16.)

In his state of humiliation, connected with the manifestation of his almighty power, Christ was "Wonderful." He left the perfect bliss of heaven, where he shared in the glory of the Father from all eternity, and "was made flesh, and dwelt among us;" (John i. 14.) "himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses," (Matt. viii. 17.) and was in all points "tempted like as we are;" (Heb. iv. 15.) and yet he was possessed of infinite power. Although equal with God, he "took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Phil. ii. 6—8.)—And for whom did he thus humble himself,—for whose sake did he leave the heavenly abodes,—for whom did he sojourn on earth "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief,"—for whose sake was he "wounded," and "bruised," and "oppressed," and "afflicted," and finally "cut off out of the land of the living?" (Isa. liii. 3—8.) It was for guilty men; for those who despised and rejected him; for those who mocked and insulted him; for those who with wicked hands crucified and slew him! Wonderful love, amazing condescension, unparalleled self-denial! All power in heaven and earth was his, but he exercised it not against his enemies;

legions of angels were at his command, but he called them not forth to rescue himself from his murderers; he performed many miracles, but they were all designed for the benefit of man. He gave bread to thousands, while himself had not "where to lay his head." His power was displayed in healing the sick, restoring limbs to the maimed, sight to the blind, speech to the dumb, and life to the dead. Surely we must acknowledge that this union of glory and humility, of riches and poverty, of power and infirmities, of divinity and humanity, was the most surprising display ever exhibited to mankind. Well might it be declared of the Redeemer in prophetic annunciation, "his name shall be called Wonderful!"

Christ may also be called "Wonderful," in the benefits of salvation which he imparts, and in the manner in which he imparts them to men. The provision which he made for our redemption, included a full supply for every want and necessity peculiar to our condition. He regarded us in our low estate of guilt and depravity; and purchased for us by his Mediation, blessings suited to our circumstances. For us as sinners, he provided pardon; for the unrighteous, justification; for the unholy and depraved, sanctification; for the ignorant, heavenly wisdom; for the feeble, strength made perfect in their weakness; for the tempted, deliverance, or ability to endure the

trial ; for the despairing, hope. In fine ; he offers redemption and eternal life to those, who by the slavery of Satan were held in bondage to sin ; and who by the sentence of a just law, were condemned to everlasting death.

Christ has not only procured salvation for men, but he also imparts the present benefits of this salvation, by the influence of the Holy Spirit. He not only procures heaven for us, but gives us the hope of it in this life. He not only provides the pardon of our sins, but also subdues sin in the mind by the gift of sanctification. The sanctification of believers is a distinguishing feature in the gospel of Christ, and no mean part of its glory. Sanctification is a common term in religion, to denote the ability to serve God with acceptance here, as well as the preparation for heaven by daily weakening the power of sin in us, and strengthening and confirming the love and practice of holiness. It is a Scriptural term, and is applied to those who truly believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Such are said to be “ sanctified in Christ Jesus,” (1 Cor. i. 2.) “ sanctified by the Holy Ghost,” (Rom. xv. 16.) and “ sanctified by God the Father.” (Jude 1.) Sanctification does not imply a total and intire exemption from all iniquity in this life ; because such an exemption is incompatible with the frailty of our nature, and with our condition on the earth. The believer of highest attainment does not live without sin, but

he desires to do so ; he does not observe the whole and every particular of God's Word, but he desires not to speak any words, nor think any thoughts, nor follow any pursuits, nor allow any motives, nor receive any doctrines, nor obey any precepts, that are not written in, or sanctioned by that Word.

Sanctification is a progressive work ; the gradual subduing and destroying of the power of sin in us. The entire removal and extirpation of sin are reserved for the perfection of the heavenly state. That man may be said to be sanctified, in whom sin is mortified, and in whom the love of holiness is advancing and daily gaining strength,—who is in the fear of God all the day, although he does not live without offending in many things,—who has acquired the habit of serving God, as the consequence of the love of God which is shed abroad in his heart. The sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit regulates his natural disposition, but does not altogether change it ; it controls his passions, but does not extinguish them. A man of strong and quick feelings, cannot but act in some measure under their influence : but they do not govern him, if he is also a partaker of the Holy Spirit.

It is an error with some persons, to ridicule the doctrine of sanctification, as imparted to us in this life in any degree ; as if such a doctrine detracted from the freeness and riches of salvation

by grace, and made man in part his own saviour. They talk of imputed sanctification, as the only doctrine of Scripture on this point ; and thus they are exposed to the dreadful and pernicious error, of imagining that the moral law is not binding on those, who receive their salvation as the purchase of Christ's meritorious obedience and death. They forget that sanctification produced in us, may be as freely imparted, as justification purchased for us, is freely imputed ; and that while both are the effect of divine grace, the former is communicated gradually in this life, and the latter is reserved in its full manifestation, for that great day, when believers in Christ shall enter on the enjoyment of the happiness of heaven. As justification is a change of state, from guilt and condemnation to pardon and acceptance ; so sanctification is a progressive renewal of nature, that is, of the pursuits and inclinations, of the will and affections, of the heart and conduct.

We know that the holiness of Christ is imputed to us, because it forms a part of the price of our redemption ; and thus we are said to be " sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ." (Heb. x. 10.) But this does not prove that sanctification is merely an imputed qualification, and not an active, visible operation. It affirms only that the gift of the Holy Spirit, which produces sanctification in us, is purchased by the death of Christ, in common with all the other benefits of redemption.

The design of the Gospel was to restore us to a state of holiness, as the consequence of our being justified; and we can possess no evidence of being placed in the latter state, unless we manifest the progressive work of the former.

The power of Christ must be displayed in us by a change of heart, in the present life, or his glory will not be enjoyed by us hereafter. The power of Christ is eminently displayed in producing that inward change, which is called in Scripture the "renewing of the mind." (Rom xii. 2.) That heart which naturally contemns the known commands of God, which trembles not at the divine anger, which refuses the divine mercy, which turns a deaf ear to divine invitations, which resists the call of sickness and the approach of death,—that heart, out of which "proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemy,"—(Matt. xv. 19.) that heart, Christ by his divine power renews and sanctifies, and makes it "a holy temple in the Lord, for an habitation of God through the Spirit." (Eph. ii. 21, 22.)

Again—Christ may be called "Wonderful," if we consider that secret but almighty power, which he exerts in preserving to himself a church, amidst all the opposition of the world, and of Satan, the Prince of darkness.

For the purpose of procuring and maintaining a church, his delights were, from the beginning,

“with the sons of men.” When wickedness had so covered the earth, that God determined to destroy all flesh, the church of Christ was still in existence, though limited to the members of but one family.—In the very seat of depravity, Christ had still a representative of his church, in the person of just Lot ; who, in Sodom, maintained his uprightness, and worshipped God in sincerity and truth.—When idolatry had nearly overspread the whole earth, and the knowledge of the true God seemed on the point of being lost, and the throne of Satan of being established ; Christ had then a church in the families and descendants of the eminent saints Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This church he preserved amidst the “ pleasures of sin” in Egypt, and during the forty years’ wanderings in the desert.—In the midst of the defection of many of the tribes of Israel, the destruction of the temple, and the subjugation of the people under idolatrous powers, He, upon whose shoulder was laid the government of the church, (Isa. ix. 6.) ever preserved some who bowed not the knee to Baal ; some who kept their allegiance to the God of heaven ; some who were of the true Israel, circumcised in heart and spirit. And from the day that Jesus entered on his ministry in the world, and called men to be his disciples, down to the present hour, he has by the power of his Spirit, preserved a constant generation of believers to be his witnesses upon earth.

Those who know the natural tendency of sin, to alienate the heart intirely from God, and who know that such is its infatuating influence, that the human heart willingly lends itself to promote the designs of Satan, although they involve its own destruction,—who know that the corruption of the heart yields up the service of the whole man to the implacable and unwearied enemy of souls, will not withhold their adoration from him, who is justly called “Wonderful;” when they behold his power and grace so conspicuously displayed in preserving to himself a church, notwithstanding all the opposition of Satan’s malice, and man’s depravity. And we may look forward with confidence, to the continual preservation and final triumph of this church; for Christ has not promised in vain, that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. He will not cease to manifest the energy and power of his Spirit, till he has made all things new,—till he has put down all principalities and powers, that exalt themselves against his dominion; and till he has finally established that kingdom of holiness, and peace, and happiness, of which there shall be no end.

Finally—Christ will show his claim to this prophetic name of “Wonderful,” in the final judgment which he will execute on all mankind, and in the eternal happiness which he will bestow on all his faithful servants.

During his state of humility on the earth, Christ

himself said that he came not in the character of a Judge, but of a Saviour. (John viii. 15. xii. 47.) But when he shall come again according to his promise, he will appear both as a Judge and a Saviour. His wonderful power will then be manifested, in passing sentence on impenitent men, and on rebellious angels; for all must appear before his Judgment-seat.

Wonderful will be the scene then to be exhibited! He, who, when dragged by his enemies before an earthly judge, had no attendants of honour—no guards of defence, and who was forsaken even by the small band of his disciples;—He, who once stood silent before the tribunal of Pilate, and heard with meekness the vehement and false accusations of the Jews against his spotless life, and who received the sentence of condemnation from the lips of his unjust judge;—He, who was led forth to execution, arrayed in robes of mock royalty by the unfeeling soldiery, crowned with thorns, buffeted, scourged, fainting under the weight of his cross;—He, who hung on the accursed tree, and died with malefactors, being made a spectacle to men and angels;—He will come on the great day of his power, accompanied by “ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands” of attendant angels; (Rev. v. ii.) He will sit on the throne of his glory; from his face heaven and earth will flee away, and leave no covert to hide those guilty

spirits, who dread to meet the eye of the Son of man. (Rev. i. 7. xx. 11.) Before him shall stand small and great, kings and rulers of nations, princes and judges of the earth, rich and poor, the old and the young. From his mouth shall be heard that definitive sentence, which will at once bring swift destruction on his adversaries; and also that delightful award of grace and mercy, which will introduce his servants to perfect and endless happiness.

The grace of Christ should, then, be sought by us, while it may be obtained. We stand in continual need of his help and favour. Unless he be our friend, the present life must be vain, as well as transitory,—a respite only from punishment, instead of a preparation for happiness; and dreary and hopeless must be our prospect of another state of being! If we seek his aid, he will not refuse us: he himself has said, “Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.” (Matt. vii. 7.) But if we neglect him, while he offers to show his wonderful grace and mercy in our salvation; the day is coming, when we shall call in vain, and when he will show his wonderful power in our destruction. “Kiss the Son lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little.” (Ps. ii. 12.)

EQUITY OF THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT.

ALL errors in religion may be traced to one source—improper views of the character of the Deity. The systems of falsehood, of idolatry, and of cruelty, which are observed by heathen nations, all originate in ignorance of the character, the perfections, and the will of the true God.—And to the same cause we must ascribe the many lamentable and awful errors, into which many persons fall in their religious faith, in Christian countries. The antient Greeks and Romans multiplied their deities into the number of all the attributes, which they believed to be peculiar to Divinity. They represented their gods not merely as indulging in the vices of men, but as practising them to a degree, which their worshippers would not be willing to tolerate in each other. Being “vain in their imaginations, their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the truth of God into a lie; and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator.” (Rom. i. 21—25.) All these dreadful mistakes proceeded from ignorance of the nature of the true God.

And all the errors which may be observed in our own land, proceed also from the absence of a right knowledge of God :—We possess a revelation of the will of God, in which the character of the Deity is plainly set forth ; but it is to the neglect or misunderstanding of this revelation, that we must impute the mistakes of men.

When we consider the nature of a revelation given to us by God, we may very properly conclude that it will not contain any thing unreasonable, that is, contrary to our right reason ; because a revelation is given to us to be understood, at least so far as it is intended to form the rule of our conduct and sentiments, and to be our guide through life to the happiness of a future state of being ; and we have no other means of interpreting it than by our reason—the assistance of the Holy Spirit to all honest inquirers being always supposed. We are not to judge beforehand, what a revelation ought or ought not to contain ; because we are not competent judges of the necessities of the case ; but we are expected to be judges of what is given in revelation, that is, so far as to be able to understand it and apply it. Now, when we find any particular religious sentiment held by many persons, and held by them not because it is a sentiment pleasing to human nature in general, or to them in particular, but because they believe it to be a doctrine revealed from heaven,—when we meet with

this case, we ought not at once to reject the sentiment as unreasonable and unscriptural, and not worth our examination ; how contrary soever it may be to our own private and peculiar opinions. The circumstances in which we find it maintained, and its alleged Scriptural authority, demand our serious attention and investigation, before we either receive or reject it. With respect to any peculiar doctrine which unhappily divides the Christian world, we ought not to condemn those who hold it as ignorant, and enthusiastic, and fanatical ; but to inquire how far the doctrine in question, may seem to be supported by the testimony of the Word of God.

That system of religion is to be rejected, which is at variance with any part of the Scriptures ; or which can be maintained only by selecting certain portions of the Word of God, which, taken apart from the connection in which they stand, countenance in some degree the peculiarities of the system ; but which, when interpreted, in conjunction with the train of reasoning in which they are found, and the scope of the argument to which they appertain, assume quite a different aspect, and evidently bear quite another meaning.

The suitableness of the Bible to the condition of mankind, in all its doctrines and precepts, is plainly seen in this fact, that every doctrine implies or directs to a duty, and every prescribed duty promotes our temporal welfare and profit.

There are many things, doubtless in the Scriptures, which refer either wholly or more particularly to the peculiar characters addressed, or the peculiar circumstances of the persons to whom they were at first written. But there must be a universality of application; or the use of the Bible to us is greatly diminished; and it becomes a special rather than a general revelation. Religion is in all ages of the world the same thing; the same sort of transaction between God and the soul of man. We must not follow up with our reasoning and arguments, any declaration of Scripture, as far as it may be carried. It is by this means that the most opposite doctrines are thought, by their respective advocates, to be contained in the Scriptures. We are to receive what is *written*, and to take it in its plain, unforced sense, always preferring a general to a particular interpretation; being assured that though there may be many difficulties to us, there are no real contradictions in the Word of God. If every thing were demonstrated to us, there would be no room for faith; but the present is a state of faith, the future will be a state of perfect knowledge and enjoyment.

The system of religion is one and the same, both in the Old Testament, and in the New; and therefore we find so many terms in the latter, borrowed from the former; so that a knowledge of the former, will of course greatly assist us in

interpreting the latter. The New Testament is the completion of the canon of Scripture; it is the last part of the revelation of God's will, and is therefore more clear than the preceding part; and shows us more fully the purposes and designs of God, in his gracious dealings with man.

We ought, in explaining any Scriptural expressions, to have constant care to bear in mind, as our rule of interpretation, the particular sense in which they were used by the sacred writers;—whether the terms employed are of general import, or of particular application;—whether they are expressions arising out of, and alone applicable to the Gospel, or borrowed (as is most frequently the case,) from terms in common use among the Jews; and conveying to them a limited and definite meaning. For instance, when speaking of the New Birth, the term was intelligible to a Jew, who had been accustomed to hear this expression applied to those who became proselytes to the Jewish faith: it was a common saying among them, that such a person was to be considered as a new-born infant. In this instance, we have the full meaning of our term Conversion.

—So also with respect to the term Election; the Jews esteemed themselves, as they truly were, the chosen people of God, selected by him to be fully informed of his will, and to be the depositaries of his true worship. When the Gospel made known the admission of the Gentiles, to

equal privileges with the Jews ; the sacred writers used, with respect to the former, the terms which formerly were appropriated only to the latter.

The doctrines of the Gospel are the objects of faith ; and they are also the objects of reason. As the objects of faith, they are to be received on the ground that they proceed from God ; and as the objects of reason, they must be understood ; that is, so far as to be esteemed proper motives to the observance of the precepts which are founded on them, and which are intended to influence the heart and affections. If they are contrary to reason, (which is no other than the divine light imparted to man, and aided by experience,) they cannot be received as proceeding from that Being, who has addressed to our understanding, all the doctrines which he has propounded to our faith.—There is an excellent rule laid down by St. Peter ; and which rule he charges us to take with us in the first place, in attending to the “ word of prophecy,” or the Holy Scriptures ; namely, “ that no prophecy of the Scriptures is of any private interpretation ;” (2 Pet. i. 20.) that is, no part of Holy Writ is to be separated from the connexion in which it is found, in order to be explained in favour of any particular sentiments in religion ; or to be wrested into a contradiction to some other parts of Scripture.—If we abide by this rule in considering all the passages which bear on our present subject,

and also some of the doctrines which have been built on them, we shall be kept from many erroneous opinions ; and shall better understand the Gospel, as a revelation made generally to mankind at large, and not designed for the benefit merely of a small and limited number of the human race.

With respect to the government of God, we are assured that “ all his ways are judgment.” (Deut. xxxii. 4.) Now if it be a question, whether men are under the moral government of God or not, then there is no authority for stating any of the relations in which we stand towards our Creator ; or of the motives which should influence, or the rules which should govern our actions ; or of our prospects in another state of being. But if we allow (as we must, if we believe the Scriptures to be a revelation from God to man,) that there is a moral government exercised over men by their Maker ; we are then bound to inquire what is the nature of this government, by what rules and to what end it is exercised.

The perfections of God are incommunicable to any created being, in the same degree in which they are exercised by the Creator. But the knowledge of them is made known to us, in language familiar and comprehensible to our understanding. God is represented to us as perfect, (Ps. xviii. 30. Matt. v. 48.) “ a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right:”

(Deut. xxxii. 4.) all which terms are understood by us, and must mean the perfection of the virtues, which are known to us under those names. The government of God must be in perfect accordance with our notions of what is good, and true, and just, and right ; because all true notions of what is good, proceed from God ; and were originally imparted to the mind of man, when his Creator “ breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.” (Gen. ii. 7.) If the justice and wisdom and goodness of God be allowed in the natural government of the world, they must also be allowed in his moral government ; and especially in the Gospel, the last dispensation which he has made known to man. In this dispensation as well as in the former, it is fully stated that all mankind are sinners, that all have incurred the divine displeasure, and that all have broken a law by which they are sentenced to endless banishment from the divine presence ; but the means of recovery from this degradation,—of deliverance from the curse, and restoration to the favour of God, are more plainly set forth to us in the New Testament, than in the Old. Now, as in the natural world, it is most evident to our senses, that God has made provision for the subsistence of all his creatures ; so in the moral world, we find from the Gospel, that he has provided a scheme which embraces all mankind ; he has made known a redemption which meets the case

of a lost world in its full extent, and offers help to every human being. Such were all the declarations of the heavenly messengers, who announced the Saviour; of Christ himself; and of all his inspired servants. The annunciation of the great Deliverer, was in these words; "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men." (Luke ii. 14.) Such a Saviour was announced, as had for ages been the "Desire of all nations;" (Hag. ii. 7.)—the Saviour of all who trust in him. The words of Christ himself are, "I came not to judge the world, but to save the world." (John xii. 47.) The apostles declare that "it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners;" (1 Tim. i. 15.) that "the grace of God that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men;" (Titus ii. 11.) and that "as by one man's disobedience many (that is, all) were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many (that is, all) be made righteous." (Rom. v. 18, 19.) By the sin of one, all fell under condemnation; and by the obedience of one, must all be made righteous, who wish to be saved. The evils of the fall are suffered by all, and all may enjoy the benefits of redemption. The word *many* means all mankind, in the clause which relates to the redemption by Christ Jesus, as it does in that which relates to the imputation of original sin. The design of the Gospel is as universal,

as the necessity for the Gospel ; and its application may be as universal as its offer ; and would be so, were not many “ hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” (Heb. iii. 13.)

Those who hold a different doctrine, and who maintain that none will be saved, except those who are elected or predestinated to eternal life, by the secret purpose of God, talk much of the Eternal Counsels of God, and of a covenant made from all eternity between the Sacred Persons of the Adorable Trinity, to save such and such persons of the human race. We know not what warrant of Scripture they have for such a doctrine. By reasoning on the necessity of things, from an assumed notion of the divine Prescience, they infer the necessity of eternal Election or Predestination ; but if the doctrines of the Gospel, and especially this momentous one of election, are to be inferred from a train of reasoning, and if we must admit this doctrine, from a consideration of the difficulties of otherwise reconciling the foreknowledge of God and the free-will of man, we may ask, why Revelation has been given us ? Also if the notion of an Eternal Covenant for the purposes just named, be a fact, and as they allow, the foundation of the Gospel, how is it that when the Gospel was promulgated, the terms were so directly opposite to such a notion ! How can those tidings of a Saviour be “ good tidings of great joy to all people,” (Luke ii. 10.) which

convey the intelligence that a few only, and those an eternally-preappointed number, are to be saved! God created the whole human race; and sin has brought the whole into a lost and ruined condition; and grace offers salvation to all; it has provided a Saviour for all; and “God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John iii. 17.) Can words be more explicit? (and they are the words of Christ himself.) Here are the origin of salvation, the terms of it, the necessity of it, and the design of it. Can an offer of salvation be more general? Can the terms be more easy of comprehension? Can the design of it be more universal? Why then should we so connect them with any discussion respecting

“Fix’d fate, free-will, fore-knowledge absolute,”

as to fall under the necessity of concluding, that redemption was not designed for general acceptance?

It is no argument against the universality of the offer and design of the Gospel, to say that all do not believe; and therefore that they only believe, who are appointed to be saved. If they believe not, here is a just ground for their condemnation; and that too according to the tenour of the Gospel, “He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth

on him." (John iii. 37.) There is no necessity for having recourse to the dreadful doctrine of reprobation. If men trust not in the Saviour, who is both able and willing to save all, they cut themselves off from the benefit of his redemption, without being thereto necessarily impelled by a decree.—We know that the Calvinists, as they are called, repel with abhorrence the charge of averring that some men are impelled not to believe, that they are lost notwithstanding all their desires and efforts to be saved; and they affirm that men are the cause of their own destruction, by not receiving the Gospel which is offered to all, but which is made effectual only to such as are predestinated to eternal life. But, if some are appointed to be saved, and the remainder left to the effects of their own depravity, which is the same thing as to be left without provision for redemption, how are we to get rid of a decree affecting both parties; the one to make their salvation certain; and the other to render their perdition a case of necessity?

It is vain to object, that if Christ came to save all, all must therefore be saved; this is to make the terms in which God offers a Saviour to mankind, subject to our rule of interpretation; to raise difficulties in the way of Omnipotence; and to affirm that the plain declarations of Scripture, are at variance with the design of the Author of Scripture.

It was the notion of the Jews, with respect to themselves as a nation, that in consequence of the promises and privileges which they enjoyed, they must, as Jews, of necessity be saved ; and this notion the Apostle Paul combats in the ninth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans ; where he proves that God's promise would not fail, even should all the race of Israel, according to the flesh, be unbelievers ; because God had a seed by faith among the Gentiles. The promises were made to all, but the condition of faith was appended, by which both Jews and Gentiles might partake of the benefits of redemption ; but, destitute of faith, no privileges of birth, or of election to privileges, could bring them within the Covenant of Grace.

The object of Christ's mission is plainly stated to be to save the world ; but many reject him, because, as he himself said, they love " darkness rather than light." (John iii. 19.) But the counsel of God is not hereby frustrated, nor his purpose thwarted ; he leaves his reasonable creatures to act with perfect liberty, as free, and therefore accountable agents. His Holy Spirit is offered and given to all, or, such is the depravity of man, none would be willing to be saved by grace, much less desirous of salvation : but all do not obey the motions of the Holy Spirit ; many do always resist his holy influence, and thus exclude themselves from the blessings of redemption.

There is no merit in man's co-operating with the Holy Spirit ; because God is the author of all spiritual strength. The evil is man's, if he persists in unbelief ; but the glory is God's, when man exercises saving faith ; for faith is God's gift to men. The same evidence is presented to all, but all do not receive it and act upon it ; the same Spirit is given to all, but all do not co-operate with it. Salvation is of grace, not of merit ; it is within the reach of all, but many neglect and despise it. God shows "the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy," that is, those who obey the call of the Gospel ; and he also shows his power on "the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction,—(Rom. ix. 22, 23.) not fitted or prepared by God for the purpose of destruction, but fitted by themselves by abusing the "much long-suffering" of God, till they were ripe for destruction. So in the case of Pharaoh, we are not to suppose that God created him for the sole purpose of his opposing the will of God, that God might show his power in destroying him ; that is, that God himself hardened his heart, and inspired him with a rebellious spirit in order to punish him for it. The meaning evidently is, that God left him to the natural hardness of his heart, as a just punishment for his obstinacy, in resisting the evidence of so many miracles, which were wrought to prove what was the will of God. And God preserved him and his people from utter de-

struction, during the plagues which he sent on the land, that his own power might be the more manifest; which is the meaning of the expression in Rom. ix. 17; "For this same purpose have I raised thee up," or rather, "have preserved thee."

Many persons argue from what they think they know of the divine prescience, or foreknowledge; they contend that in consequence of this prerogative of Deity, by which he foreknew all that would be saved, he must have predestinated them to salvation; since what God foresees must of necessity happen, which is therefore tantamount to a decree to that effect. But we might as well argue from what we know of the divine justice and mercy, and thence infer that there could not be any such thing as predestination. The foreknowledge of God is in perfect consistence with the free-will of his rational creatures. It does not necessarily *cause* the completion of every event which he foresees. We are able to foresee (in probability) many events; but this does not affect the issue, either to accelerate or retard it. In like manner, it is not difficult to conceive that God foresees (in certainty) events, as resulting from the moral liberty of mankind; but does not therefore decree that they shall inevitably take place. The whole responsibility lies on the free agent; he is not shackled or controlled by the prescience of God.

The Calvinists say that unless we allow the decree of God, as securing the salvation of a certain number of the human race, the purpose for which Christ died might be defeated; seeing it would be left in uncertainty whether, in consequence of the total depravity of mankind, any would believe on him to eternal life: here, they say, lies the difficulty of the case. But if we look simply at the words of revelation, and learn thence the design of God in giving his Son to die for us, and his own willingness to receive all that return unto him, offering to all the assistance of his Holy Spirit—rendered indispensably necessary in consequence of their own weakness and depravity, we shall not find any difficulty in the case. We have nothing to do with such consequences, as the Calvinists say must ensue, unless their system be adopted. The difficulties which seem to them to be insuperable, may be so to our weak reason, but they are difficulties of their own creating, by clashing the decrees of God, (hidden from us,) with his express declarations, (revealed to us.) We are not called upon to remove these difficulties, or to make out a system which shall seem to remove them; we have only to take the plain message addressed to us in the Word of God, calling upon us to repent, and believe, and be saved, and offering to us the necessary assistance to discharge these important duties. The difficulty of reconciling the fore-

knowledge of God with the free-will of man is not our concern. When we contemplate such a subject, we may be led to ask with the disciples of Christ, "Who then can be saved?" and like them we must be contented with the divine reply, "With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible." (Matt. xix. 25, 26.) —If, (as the modern Calvinists think,) there be no difficulty in supposing that the foreknowledge of God, does not decree or cause the perdition of the ungodly, but that they are lost in consequence of their own unbelief and wilful continuance in sin; why should there be supposed an insuperable difficulty, in believing that the foreknowledge of God does not decree or cause the salvation of those that believe?

Besides, if we follow up their argument drawn from the divine prescience, it will prove too much; and we shall come at last to the shocking conclusion that God is the author of all evil! But this is not the rule by which we should proceed in ascertaining the mode of the divine government over his creatures. "We have a more sure word of prophecy," (2 Pet. i. 19.) to which we ought to attend; and by which alone we ought to be guided. If we apply the rule laid down by St. Peter, mentioned above, to the passages of Scripture which are thought to establish the doctrine of predestination, we shall find that it is owing to their being interpreted independently

of their due connexion and agreement with the general tenour of Scripture, that so many persons have been led to think that this doctrine has the sanction of the Word of God. In fact, it is a doctrine rather of inference, than of plain statement. Its advocates select a certain number of passages, and thence infer the necessity of the doctrine. But we cannot suppose that so momentous a subject, should be left to be inferred by argumentation, and supported by abstruse reasonings on the nature of some of the divine perfections : it would rather have been plainly set down, as plainly as the Grace of God is declared, or as the mediation of Christ is set forth to our view.

The Scriptures teach us that the provision made in the Gospel, is commensurate with the misery of the case for which it was designed ; and when the terms *elect* and *predestinate* are employed, they refer to privileges, and not to absolute, unconditional appointment to eternal life. The great mystery which was hidden in the purpose of God, and “ which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men,” (Eph. iii. 5.) but which was revealed by the Gospel, was “ that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs,” (Eph. iii. 6.) together with the Jews, of the promises of God. In stating and explaining this mystery to the Jews, the Apostles make use of the same terms as applicable to the case of the Gentiles, which

were formerly applied solely to the Jews, when they were the only true worshippers of God. The prejudices of the Jews against this extension of God's merciful designs, were to be overcome by proving that the "eternal purpose" of God, "which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord," (Eph. iii. 11.) always embraced the whole human race; although the manifestation of it was reserved, to be "revealed unto the holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." (Eph. iii. 5.)

The peculiar opinions of the Jews are combated by the Apostle Paul; especially in the Epistle to the Romans. They believed that God must necessarily pardon and accept them as a nation, because of the piety of their forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and because of the promises which God had made to them and to their seed. This notion the Apostle combats chiefly, in that otherwise difficult chapter the ninth to the Romans; in which he proves that the promises of God were limited to those who were truly the children of Abraham, by imitating him in faith. He shows that even the Israelites, to whom the promises were originally made, were excluded from participating in them by the absence of faith; while the Gentiles were admitted, by following after the righteousness which is of faith. And in chap. iii. 29, 30, he shows that God is the God of the Gentiles, as well as of the Jews; and that he will justify both through faith.

Therefore the question of predestination, as stated by St. Paul, refers wholly to the admission of the Gentiles to equal privileges with the Jews, and not at all to personal and absolute election to eternal life.

We find also, that our Lord opposed the exclusive sentiments entertained by the Jews, as far as the manifestation of the Gospel dispensation then allowed; the full revelation being reserved, as was shown above, to be declared by the Apostles. In the sixth chapter of St. John's Gospel we perceive this intention, and especially in that noted verse the thirty-seventh, where he evidently meant to show, that the Gentiles should be admitted to the privileges of the Gospel, as well as the Jews. He charges them with their own destruction in the preceding verse, by declaring that they had seen him, but had not believed; and then he adds, that all whom the Father had given him should come to him; that is, that as God had appointed him to be the Saviour of the world, all the human race, without distinction of birth or country, might come to him, and that he, so far from imitating the Jews, who despised all other people, and rejected them as dogs and aliens from the family of God, would in no-wise cast them out.

Many other instances might be adduced, in which our Lord opposed the sentiments of the Jews as to their national superiority; whether

grounded on their election in Abraham, their knowledge of God through his law, or the observance of the ceremonies of the Levitical law. "Think not," said he, "to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father, for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham ;" (Matt. iii. 9.) by which was doubtless intended the design of God to admit the Gentiles to his Church.—Again—He taught them that man is justified by the observance, not by the mere knowledge of the law when he related the story of the good Samaritan, whom he set in a more amiable light than the hard-hearted priest, or the self-righteous Levite. (Luke x. 30—37.) And, again, he more plainly testified that their privileges would not exempt them from punishment; and also that the long abandonment of the Gentiles, during the times of their ignorance would not exclude *them* (on their believing) from the benefits of the New Covenant. "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the East, and from the West, and from the North, and from the South, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God." (Luke xiii. 28, 29.)

The bitterness of the Jews against the doctrine, that the Gentiles were accepted of God as well as

themselves, may be seen in their behaviour during the defence of St. Paul at Jerusalem. In justification of his conduct, he declared that God, by an especial revelation, commanded him to be "his witness unto all men," saying, "Depart; for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live." (Act xxii. 21, 22.)

Some persons admit the doctrine of election in theory, without being willing to apply it in practice; they regard it merely as a matter of speculation, and not as the ground of any practical inference. They allow that it should not be held up in a prominent light in preaching the Gospel; because of its being hard to be understood, and easy to be perverted. But if it be a doctrine of Scripture, it ought to be plainly and forcibly brought forward in public preaching, as it involves the most serious consequences to mankind. Others, who maintain that the Gospel is not preached, where this doctrine is not constantly inculcated, do preach it themselves fully, and introduce it into every sermon, and give it a prominent place in every public address. But what is the general result of such preaching? Do we find by experience that it tends to sanctification? Do we find such congregations remarkable for Christian activity in promoting every good cause?

Are they diligent in endeavouring to put the Bible into the hands of all? Do they give of their substance to send the Gospel to distant lands? Do they not aim more at proselyting, than converting; at bringing men over to their party, and not to Christianity? Do they not judge of men by their knowledge, and not by their faith, —by their vocabulary, and not by their conduct? Are they not scoffers at those who care for the spiritual darkness of the heathen? Do they not ridicule the idea of extending the Redeemer's kingdom, by preaching the Gospel to heathen nations? And do they not refuse to preach the Gospel to sinners, as such, at home; that is, to call on men to repent, and believe, and be saved; although the Word of God so expressly and strongly commands this duty? Do they not in this instance disobey the command of God, in order to be consistent with their peculiar tenets? And why do they act thus? Because their notion of predestination freezes the springs of Christian love, diligence, and duty,—because it paralyzes the efforts of man, lest, in endeavouring to further the salvation of his fellow creatures, he should be found to fight against the decrees of God! They are for waiting till God's time be come, as they express it; as the Jews of old did, in neglecting to rebuild the temple of the Lord, saying, "The time is not come." (Hag. i. 2.)

If we meet with any religious notions, which

seem to destroy some of the finest feelings of our nature, we may justly conclude that they are contrary to Scripture, because they are contrary to nature and reason. We are commanded to prefer the glory of God to our own advantage, and to choose his will rather than our own; and when religion and the world are in competition, to make any sacrifice for the former. But religion does not obliterate the characters of humanity. When we are commanded to say, "Thy will be done," we are not taught to look with indifference on the moral condition of our fellow-men. The wisdom of God designs the benefit of man; and his will is never at variance with his wisdom. The Gospel certainly teaches us to seek earnestly the salvation of all men, even of "those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth." (2 Tim. ii. 25.)

But some advocates of the doctrine of election, seem to be deprived thereby of bowels of compassion for their perishing fellow-sinners; and because they believe that God has assigned some men to inevitable perdition, they affect to speak of so dreadful an event with composure, with indifference with pleasure! And do we not see many personal and relative evils, resulting from the abuse of this doctrine? Many persons, after long departure from God, look back to his decrees for comfort, and take hope because they believe

themselves to be of the number of the elect; instead of attaining to those evidences in life and conversation, which will show that they are called to the privileges of the Gospel—that they are chosen or elected to the favour which was once limited to the Jews, but which is now freely offered to all. This would be to make their “calling and election sure.” (2 Pet. i. 10.) Others continue in wilful and open sin without remorse, on the same ground; and many intirely neglect all religious instruction in their families, as useless and *legal*; and say that if God has any of his people in their household, they will be called in his own time, and that their efforts can be of no avail!—Some go still further, and are not ashamed to affirm, that they never pray for the conversion of their children, lest they should be found asking God to set aside some of his eternal decrees!

But they do not only limit the mercy of God, to a certain portion of the human race; they also impose another limitation in their mode of explaining this particular doctrine. They will acknowledge none to be of the number of the elect, who do not hold in the same sense, and to the same extent, all the doctrines which they declare to be revealed in the Word of God; which doctrines are certainly necessary to the support of their system, but are not necessarily contained in Revelation. They banish certain words from

usage, in religious instruction and conversation ; they will not endure to hear of its being the *duty* of men to believe, of free-will, virtue, good works, &c. And they have a fixed vocabulary for speaking of all religious concerns ; from which, whoever deviates is at once set down by them as a man of the world, a child of darkness, or at best a *mere moral man*. They insist on the necessity of experiencing a certain process in the mind, which they call conversion : the order must be great horror of future wrath ; evident conflict with some powerful temptation of Satan ; sensible change of mind, effected instantaneously by some sermon, portion of Scripture, or unaccountable internal impulse ; a sudden turning from what they call the doubts and fears of unbelief, to the strongest assurance of salvation. To be confident of their personal election to eternal life, they esteem the very perfection of faith. With them, self-examination is unworthy doubting of the grace of God ; fear of God's anger against sin is derogatory to the glory of the finished work of Christ ; and want of assurance is unbelief. In fine, knowledge is substituted for practice ; the righteousness of Christ is made to supersede a renewed heart and holy conversation ; boasting takes the place of humility ; and an assurance of heaven is accounted the best preparation for it.

Those who maintain the doctrine of Predestination, often attempt to give answers to objec-

tions against the doctrine, which objections are never brought, or ought never to be brought against it; such as, Suppose God is pleased to show mercy to any of his rebellious creatures, it would be unjust towards the rest, not to show them mercy also. This objection, they say, is a limiting of the Almighty, by denying him the exercise of a prerogative claimed by all earthly sovereigns; who display their sovereignty, by selecting from guilty persons, objects on whom to exercise their benevolence, and leave others to suffer the rigorous sentence of the law.—The advocates of Election, in their zeal for the honour of God, seem not to be aware that they themselves diminish his honour, by instituting a comparison between the prerogatives of the Most High, and those of the rulers of this world; and especially by claiming for the Deity, an exercise of power, in a way similar to that shown by the kings of the earth; as if the conduct of the latter were undoubtedly correct in this particular, and were as equitable as it is free; whereas it is often the result of caprice, of misinformation, of bribery, or some unworthy motive. We do not presume to deny the exercise of unlimited power to the Deity; but we object to imputing to him any exercise of it in the way of sovereignty, which is contrary to his own Word, and to what his Word has taught us respecting Justice, and Mercy, and Equity, and Truth. The sovereignty of God is

certainly exercised, for the good of his creatures. We are assured that "he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." (Lam. iii. 33.) And if he do not, in the exercise of absolute power, willingly grieve the erring children of men, during their probation on earth, and under great and wilful provocations, can we believe that he eternally appointed any to endless grief, before they entered on this state of trial !

Besides, this is not the way in which the question should be considered, with respect to any difficulty which may belong to it ; because if it be a Scriptural doctrine, we are bound to receive it, notwithstanding any difficulties real or apparent which it may present. The question is simply, What is the statement of Scripture to fallen rebellious man ? Is it not an offer of mercy to the whole, without any exception ? Hath not God sworn in the Old Testament, that he has "no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live ?" (Ezek. xxxiii. 11.) If the wicked die by a decree, and not by their own wickedness alone, why are the ministers of God so solemnly charged to warn them of the evil consequences of their guilt ; and assured that their blood shall be required at the hands of those ministers who forbear to warn them !—If the destruction of the Jewish nation were appointed by an eternal decree, why did the Saviour shed tears over their obstinacy and

rebellion ; and what meaning could there be in his affecting expostulation, “ How often would I have gathered thy children together, and ye would not ? ” (Matt. xxiii. 37.) Was then the eternal purpose of Christ at variance with his repeated offers of mercy to the descendants of Israel, when he would have gathered them together and saved them !

We know it is said by our opponents, that the decrees of God are not irrespective of the conduct of men, but that the elect are saved as redeemed and sanctified ; and the reprobate are condemned as wilful and hardened impenitents. But we may ask, how is it possible to conceive of irreversible decrees, affecting the great result, and not also affecting the circumstances which lead to that result ? And how can we reconcile the absolute predestination to eternal life of some persons, and the absolute rejection of others, with the plain and positive declarations of Scripture, in which the offer of pardon and redemption is made to men as free agents ? Why are men besought and earnestly intreated to repent, to be converted, to believe, to be reconciled to God, not to harden their hearts, to choose life rather than death, to flee from the wrath to come, to lay hold on eternal life,—if these duties cannot be performed, nor these blessings obtained, but by those who are predestinated thereto by the eternal purpose of God !

Is it not plainly stated in the New Testament,

that God will “have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth?” (1 Tim. ii. 4.) If God be love; (1 John iv. 8.) can that system of religious belief, be the true and Scriptural one, which represents the Deity as unamiable? And in what other light can we view that system, which represents a certain portion of mankind as numbered out from all eternity, for absolute, irreversible redemption; and a certain other portion for inevitable perdition! It does not alter the case to say, that God has not merely appointed the salvation of the elect, but has also appointed the way in which they must be saved, that is, a way of holiness. We know that this is the only way, in which any can behold the face of the Lord; but we think also that this is a part of the way of salvation, which is so open to all, that any may enter therein and be saved, without being secretly impelled by an eternal decree in their favour. The whole human race are called according to God’s purpose, but all do not love him, and therefore they cannot claim the advantage of the promise annexed—that all things shall work together for their good. (Rom. viii. 28.) Those whom God foreknew as objects of his mercy, that is, all mankind, he predestinated or appointed to be saved, in a way of conformity to the image of his Son. (Rom. viii. 29.) This declaration merely proves that there is no variation in God’s scheme of human redemption; but

that as he purposed to show mercy to mankind, so also he purposed to manifest it only on those who should obey the call of the Gospel, and attain to a justified state by faith in Christ; and being sanctified by the Holy Spirit, should be thereby prepared for a state of glorification. (Rom. viii. 30.)

The whole plan of human redemption, demonstrates the willingness of God to save men. The origin of redemption must have commenced in this willingness. The secret but gracious purpose of God, is the fountain of our recovery. God is not made willing to save us, by the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ; but his willingness provided this way of restoration. His mercy is not purchased by this sacrifice; but the sacrifice is the gift and provision of his free, unbounded mercy.—We should look for our title to heaven in the merits of our divine Mediator, and for our fitness for that holy state to the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit; and not to the hidden purposes and decrees of God.—By pursuing a contrary method, persons fall either into presumption or despair. Of the former, some seek comfort with respect to their acceptance with God, not by examining into the present state of their heart and conduct, but by looking back to former feelings and persuasions; and because they once believed themselves to be of the number of the elect, they take consolation, even in a

state of departure from God ; and from the assurance that they once exercised “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ,” they are confident that they cannot fall away unto perdition, but shall in the end be numbered with the chosen people of God. But if this kind of reasoning be good, Satan himself might take comfort in his chains of darkness ; for he was once an angel of light.—Of the latter, many sincere persons, who have once received with joy and thankfulness the glad tidings of the Gospel, are met by this doctrine of predestination, either from the pulpit or in books ; and are filled with terror lest they should not be of the number of the elect. In their anxious inquiries respecting the question, “Are there few that be saved ?” they forget the divine command, “Strive to enter in at the strait gate ;” (Luke xiii. 23, 24.) and lose the comfort of the assurance, that “every one that asketh, receiveth ; and he that seeketh, findeth ; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.” (Matt. vii. 8.) They lose sight of the gracious promise, that God giveth wisdom to all them that ask of him, and giveth “liberally, and upbraideth not.” (James i. 5.)

We may justly suspect the truth of any doctrine that has a tendency to despair : God does not call men to hopeless sorrow ; the sorrow of the Gospel is a “godly sorrow,” which “worketh repentance to salvation, not to be repented of.” (2 Cor.

vii. 10.) But terrors respecting the secret decrees of God, are not countenanced by any part of God's word. His government, as far as it is visible to us in Providence, is full of mercy and love, as well as wisdom and truth. And his moral government, as far as it is revealed to us in the Bible, is equally guided by loving-kindness and tender mercies. "He delighteth in mercy." (Mic. vii. 18.) "The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him;" but he also taketh pleasure in "those that hope in his mercy." (Psalm cxlvii. 11.)

The government of God is exercised over men, for their temporal and eternal benefit. It is a mild and equitable government; administered according to the eternal principles of truth and justice. God is the universal Sovereign, and "doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" (Dan. iv. 35.) But "righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne." (Psalm xcvii. 2.) His government of mankind originated in mercy, is carried on by love, and will be completed to the satisfaction of divine justice and to the honour of divine truth. Those who are saved under this government, must ever ascribe their redemption to free grace; for to that alone are we indebted for the means of salvation, and for the free manner in which it is proffered to our acceptance.

And those unhappy souls who are lost under this government, must impute their perdition to their own hardened obstinacy, which resisted and grieved the Holy Spirit, whose influence was ready to lead them into the path of safety; and though condemned and banished from the presence of God, the fountain of happiness, they must for ever acknowledge that "all his ways are judgment; a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he."

THE CHRISTIAN'S VIEW OF DEATH.

IN the condition of man on the earth, we find a mixture of sorrow and of joy, of pleasure and of suffering, an unequal distribution of good and evil. But although all men do not share alike in the happiness of life, nor fall in the same degree under the stroke of calamity, yet all die ; no exception is found from this common lot of mortality ; the grave is the last home of every one, from the powerful monarch to the houseless beggar. So that whatever inequality be found in the circumstances of men during life, they are at last reduced to the same level, and all distinctions cease in the grave. It matters not what station in life we occupy, nor in what rank we move, death will take us away from every relation—from every employment.—Are the rich seeking pleasure, and expending their wealth in procuring luxurious gratifications ? They must leave every enjoyment, and become poor in the tomb. Are the children of poverty suffering in their cheerless abodes,—are they weary and broken down with severe toil ? They shall rest from their labours in the grave. Whether we are at ease or in trouble, in sickness or in health,

young or aged, death never ceases to approach ; his arrival, though delayed to some, is certain to all. We may form the tenderest connexions in life ; the most endeared union may bind our hearts with the sweetest ties of affection and love ; remorseless death will dissolve and rend them asunder. We may be deeply engaged in plans of private interest, or of public utility ; we may be wisely and cautiously forming the best-concerted purposes ; invincible death will cut them off, and put a final close to every design, and bind down the most active individuals in immovable and lasting repose. Death is the irreversible sentence which has passed on all mankind.

The dread of death is universal. It is the abhorrence of all nature. And how, indeed, can it be otherwise ? It is a punishment ; it was denounced against us at first as the taking away of God's greatest blessing, as the privation of perfect earthly felicity. Therefore as long as existence and the enjoyment of it are accounted blessings, so long will death continue to be viewed as an evil. But when the sentence of death was first pronounced on man, it was tempered with a promise, which, although it did not repeal the decree as to its actual accomplishment on all mankind, yet altered the nature of death by assuring us of the coming of a Deliverer who should vanquish this great enemy, and transform the gloomy grave into a passage to the bright and

endless day of heavenly felicity. The nature of this promise, and the gracious design of God, revealed in it, were known to the fathers of old time, before the coming of Christ, and the promulgation of the Gospel. Hence they were enabled to walk by faith, as "strangers and pilgrims on the earth;" hence they obtained witness that they were righteous; hence they were translated without seeing death; hence they were preserved in the midst of judgments which overthrew the world; hence they became heirs of the promises, and died in the faith and full persuasion of them. (Heb. xi.)

The promise on which the fathers exercised saving faith, was obscure when compared with the more full light which we enjoy, in the fulfilment of this promise. To them it was said, "O death, I will be thy plague; O grave, I will be thy destruction;" (Hos. xiii. 14.) but we have seen the accomplishment of this prophetic declaration, in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. Before the "fulness of time," the patriarchs, in the prospect of death, calmly gave directions concerning the disposal of their bodies; they left the light of life with that strong faith, which assured them that they should be redeemed from the power of the grave; but unto us this redemption is made more "manifest, by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and

immortality to light through the Gospel." (2 Tim. i. 10.) That is, the knowledge of the way of salvation, and the free offer of its invaluable benefits are more fully set before us, to the intent that our faith might be stronger, and our hope more bright and more established.

But has the knowledge of life and immortality these happy effects in us? Do we thereby live more as strangers and pilgrims, having our affections weaned from earthly things, and our earnest and longing desires directed towards the heavenly country? Is the second coming of our Lord a blessed hope unto us? Do we pray for it, —do we prepare for it? Are our hearts filled with abiding joy and peace, in the delightful prospect of everlasting blessedness? Do we regard death as the joyful end of our probation, as a freedom from all sin, as an introduction to the presence of God, and consequently to fulness of joy and everlasting pleasures? Alas! such is our ignorance, so weak is our faith, so carnal are our minds, so depraved and grovelling our affections, that we live, even under the Gospel, in great terror of death; we are prone to regard it as the consummation of calamity, as the height of suffering, as a curse which sweeps away all comfort, and puts a final and lasting end to all enjoyment! Thus we are too much disposed to regard the Gospel, rather as something which tends to enable us to tolerate the thought of death, and in some mea-

sure to reconcile us to our own departure, and to that of our relatives and friends, than as the "good tidings" which put us in possession of the assurance, that now death itself is numbered among the Christian's possessions. (1 Cor. iii. 22.) We strive to meet death rather with fortitude, than with peaceful resignation. We bow beneath the stroke rather as an unavoidable calamity, than rejoice under it as the messenger of peace and grace from our heavenly Father.—Whereas we should look upon death as a conquered enemy, as a foe now transformed into a friend, as a curse now converted by Christ into a blessing ; not as the messenger of condemnation to extinguish life, and to carry us away to endless darkness and misery, but as the conductor to the gate of life, as the angel of peace commissioned to introduce us to everlasting blessedness.

It is allowed that death—the cessation of our being on earth, and the commencement of an unknown mode of existence in an unseen state—cannot but be, in some measure, a cause of alarm, and an object of aversion. It was pronounced at first as the sentence to be executed against sin, and although sin is pardoned, yet the sentence is put in force in consequence of transgression, and by virtue of that condemnation which hath passed on all men. It becomes us to have solemn thoughts concerning death, although our apprehensions, as to future consequences, are now

removed by the assurance which the Gospel gives us of eternal life. It becomes us to be humble under this stroke, which is the effect of God's displeasure against transgression. With respect to believers in Christ Jesus, death can, indeed, do them no harm, farther than their removal from the earth; but as human beings, formed at first for a residence in this lower world, and appointed to fill certain relations in life, and qualified for social enjoyment in the union of friendship and the ties of affection and of kindred,—death is to be viewed by us as an enemy; all its attendant circumstances are painful to the hearts of mortals.

It is a solemn and an awful transaction, to deposit in the ground the remains of a being that once was animated by an immortal spirit. O how painful and heart-rending to a tender mind, to hide in the gloom and corruption of the sepulchre, that form, which, when alive, filled up a useful station in the domestic circle, sustained one of the dearest relations of life, conversed, and felt, and sympathized, and aided, and consoled! O how piercing the thought, that all intercourse is at an end, that intelligence is gone from the lifeless clay, that we can no more hear the voice of our friend; no more look upon that countenance, which was wont to be brightened up with delight at seeing us mutually happy! How could we endure the separation which death causes, did we not possess the hope of immortality! Could we

bear to survive those whom we tenderly love—in whose welfare our souls are bound up—did we not believe with an assured confidence, that the departed spirit was still in existence, secure in eternal happiness; and that ourselves were fast hastening to an inseparable—an everlasting reunion with those whom we love! O joyful state of being, when myriads of souls shall be assembled, and not one sorrow be found among so vast a multitude, when the mind shall be no more prevented from enjoying to the utmost, the felicity which is present, by the dread of future calamity and sorrow,—when there shall be no possibility of again falling from happiness, because we shall be incapable of offending our God,—and when the possession of all that our most boundless wishes can desire, and of all that the riches and grace of Almighty God can bestow, shall not weaken our sense of enjoyment by satiety, nor our gratitude by repetition; but our measure of happiness, and our capacity for pleasure, shall unitedly advance and increase throughout the ages of eternity!

The temper of mind which the apostle Paul names as the prevailing disposition of his desires, in respect to the present life and to the prospects of futurity, is one which indicates the spirituality of his affections. He was willing to sustain the Christian conflict, as long as his Lord should please to send him forth to the good fight of faith, and he was anxious, as a good soldier of Christ

Jesus, to wield the heavenly weapons with perseverance and unshaken courage, while he continued a member of the church militant on earth ; but when he considered the certainty of the heavenly inheritance which was reserved for him, and compared the present state of affliction with the weight of glory prepared for him in the presence of God, he felt a strong desire to enter on his eternal rest. He was not ignorant of the nature of death, nor insensible of its terrors, nor hardened against the sensibilities of our common nature, nor indifferent to the spiritual necessities of others, as requiring his particular aid and direction ; but when his mind meditated on the glories which faith disclosed to his view, and which he knew would be fully revealed after death, he was “willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.” (2 Cor. v. 8.)

Let us consider some of the grounds, on which we also may indulge the same desire,—some of the blessings which shall follow on our being “absent from the body.”

Man, in his first estate, was not subject to mortality. His body did not contain in it the seeds of natural corruption ; nor was it exposed to the attacks of pain and disease. It was not liable to be injured by outward accidents. It was invulnerable ; inasmuch as we may suppose that the will had complete command over every part

and power thereof, so that what the mind willed, as the result of the principle of self-preservation, the body obeyed, and thus no injury could be sustained. The texture of the frame, though delicately and finely wrought, even beyond the investigation of unaided vision, was never disordered; the circulation of the vital fluids was never impeded; the nerves were never deranged, nor the sinews lacerated, nor the veins torn asunder. But sin has introduced a sad change of circumstances. Now the most robust frame is liable to mortal injury, the most muscular symmetry is subject to be destroyed by disease or accident; and a sudden disarrangement of the internal organization, produced by apparently trifling causes, leads to premature and unexpected death. And even if disease does not seize upon us, the body is worn out in the natural use of its various parts. The limbs become rigid and powerless, the sight fails, the ear ceases to receive or distinguish sounds, and the senses are no longer the avenues to pleasurable feelings. There is a term assigned to man's life; he reaches the period of his years; his body returns, according to the terms of the primeval curse, to the dust whence it was taken, and his spirit "unto God who gave it."

What are the grounds, then, on which we may desire the approach of the mortal hour? The Word of God supplies many strong reasons, why

the Christian may be "willing rather" to fall under the stroke of death,—to have the execution of the sentence of mortality accelerated. When man departed from God, he cast himself under the dominion of the malignant spirit, called Satan, who, from that time, had power over him, (yet under divine permission,) to inflict both diseases and death. Man was subject to the tyranny of the devil. Notwithstanding, there was ever a means of escape for those who were desirous of returning to their true allegiance; and in due time Christ died to destroy the works of the devil. Those, therefore, who return unto God by the appointed way of restoration, that is, through the mediation of Jesus Christ, are delivered from the power of their adversary, and are brought back under the mercy and grace of God. They exchange masters. A malignant, and hateful, and accursed spirit is forsaken, and they become the children of their heavenly Father, and enjoy the "glorious liberty" of the sons of God. Their mercies are made sweeter to them, as flowing from the source of grace and love; their afflictions are not the wounds of a malicious enemy, but the strokes of a Father, who intends their spiritual welfare; the enmity of their hearts is gradually removed, and the antipathy of their minds to spiritual things taken away, and their dispositions towards God are rectified, and thus they daily advance in a capacity to enjoy the pleasures of

the heavenly world ; and death is, at length, the kind messenger who is sent to introduce them to the presence of God, there to enter on the inheritance of the saints in light.

If death be dreaded and avoided as an evil—as a curse ; when the evil is averted and the curse changed into a blessing, it may be met with resignation—with pleasure. All the spiritual evils resulting from the fall of man, have been taken away by our Saviour, and by faith in him we become reinstated in the favour of God, and are consequently made the heirs of everlasting happiness. Death, the punishment of sin, and disease and pain and trouble and sorrow, the fruits of sin, have not been removed, although sin itself has been atoned for, and “ put away ” by the sacrifice of Christ. The evil consequences of sin, as affecting the future state of the soul, have been all annihilated to believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, who, inasmuch as he has destroyed “ him that had the power of death, that is, the devil,” (Heb. ii. 14.) and has taken away the “ sting of death,” that is, sin, is said in the Scriptures to have “ abolished death,” by bringing “ life and immortality to light by the Gospel.” Thus, the nature of death being changed, it may very reasonably become—as the door to immortality—the object of the Christian’s pleasing anticipation.

But notwithstanding the light of the Gospel, and the hope of immortality which it makes

known, we find Christians too generally, "through fear of death, all their life-time subject to bondage." (Heb. ii. 15.) Our minds are so little inflamed with the desire of heaven, that we are willing to remain in this state of absence from God, as long as health of body and peace of mind are continued. The highest attainment of our faith is, for the most part, only a state of resignation—of submission to the will of God, when the course of his Providence is apparently about to bring on the time of our departure. When affliction stops us suddenly in the career of life, we begin to cry earnestly to be spared a little longer; and when hope declines, we endeavour to be resigned to the stroke of death, and, gathering up our evidences of the divine favour, we quietly wait for the voice of God to summon us to his presence. Resignation to the will of God is a Christian duty, how severe soever the trial may be to which we are called. But this is not the state of mind in which we should be willing to rest, with respect to our departure from the body, as those who possess a "good hope through grace." We should be resigned to the loss of friends, and relatives, and earthly possessions, and life, but we should be also "willing rather," to leave all these things, that we may be "present with the Lord." And this desire to depart is perfectly compatible with a patient endurance of all the ills of life, and a cheerful readiness to bear the

burden of the day with those, to whom our continuance in the flesh is "more needful." (Philip. i. 23, 24.) There is no selfishness in true Christianity; we are not taught to shrink back from the conflict, and to leave others to struggle through the difficulties of the way, while we are safely passed into the heavenly rest. It is our duty, while we indulge the most ardent hope and most longing desire of heaven, to wait all the days of our appointed time, till our change come. (Job xiv. 14.)

As Christians we are called upon to manifest something more than mere resignation. Some of the heathens of old met death with more calmness and composure than many persons now do, who enjoy the light of the Gospel. These heathens, by the light of reason and experience, knew that death passed on all men; they regarded it as an inevitable evil; and therefore considered it to be honourable to reason and consistent with the duties of their philosophy, to undergo the universal sentence with fortitude and courage. A higher principle should influence and direct us. We should not regard death as an enemy against whom it is in vain to contend; but should remember that although he attacks us as an enemy, yet when his triumph is complete, we are made more than conquerors over him, by sharing in the fruits of the victory which Christ hath obtained for us.

The pleasures of sense being known and enjoyed in this life, and the happiness of the unseen world being only ascertained by faith, we find it a hard task to be willing to leave the joys of an existence in which flesh and spirit participate, and to enter on an unknown state of being, in which the soul can live and act independently of a union with the body. Our minds recoil at the thought of forsaking the body, and we naturally loathe the corruption of the grave. But why should we tremble at the thought of the separation of body and soul, and of the body being committed to the ground? Shall we not be raised from the dishonour of the tomb, and shall not this corruptible put on ⁱⁿ corruption, and this mortal put on immortality, and this natural body become a spiritual body, and be again united inseparably to the glorified spirit, and partake of the endless pleasures of God's immediate presence? (1 Cor. xv.) Yes; the anguish which now rends every nerve with unabated suffering; the disease which causes every pulse to throb with acute agony, and makes every sense the avenue to severe pain; the faintness which exhausts the vital spirits; the groans and cries which distress the ear and wound the heart of affectionate relatives, attendant on the beds of sickness, shall all cease in the grave, and cease for ever! Immortal health and vigour shall dwell in the reanimated frame, at the morning of the resurrection. When God shall build again the

temple of the human body, from the ruins of the grave, he shall fashion it like unto Christ's glorious body; (Phil. iii. 21.) it shall no more contain in it the seeds of disease, nor be subject to dissolution; for "the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces," (Isa. xxv. 8.) "and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain."—"Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; on such the second death hath no power." (Rev. xx. 6—xxi. 4.)

The circumstances and connexions of life tend to make us dread the approach of death; both poverty and riches have their share of influence, in causing our affections to take deeper root in the earth. The young man who rejoices in his youth, who is in "full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet," (Job xxi. 23.) looks on death as the blight of all his prospects, as a robber that would strip him of a portion of his existence; he says, "I am deprived of the residue of my years." (Isa. xxxviii. 10.) The decease of a youth, in the midst of his days, appears like the going down of the sun while it is yet day. The man who abounds in wealth, and is secure in his possessions, regards death as the invader of his peace and enjoyments; he wishes to live that he may see "his sons come to honour," (Job xiv. 21.) and the circle of his family remaining unbroken in a long succession of happy years. The man whom difficulties press on every side, on

whose unremitted exertions the sustenance of his family seems intirely to depend, and who sees a dreary prospect of want and suffering for his young and helpless babes, should he be taken from them by the stroke of death,—this man earnestly clings to life, that his aid and counsel may be cheerfully imparted, and his strength willingly spent for the benefit and support of those, who are dear to him as his own soul.

But if we consider time as a portion of eternity, and man as a being who is to live for ever, the distinction between a long and a short life upon earth seems almost obliterated. It matters not whether a man dies at twenty years of age, or at threescore years and ten. He does not cease to live; he loses no part of his existence; he is only removed to another state of being. And the wealthy man should remember that the “durable riches of eternal blessedness, infinitely outweigh all that earthly riches can purchase, all that worldly splendour and honour can bestow. He who is translated to heaven, cannot lose any thing, whatever he may leave behind on earth. And the man who fears lest the iron rod of poverty fall on his bereaved family, should constantly bear in mind, that it is not earthly substance bequeathed to relatives, but the blessing of God alone that “maketh rich, and addeth no sorrow with it.” (Prov. x. 22.) When we die, is there no Providence left? Do not the children of the wealthy stand in the same need of

Providential guidance and defence as the descendants of the poor man? When earthly resources are cut off, has God lost any means whereby to work? When all visible support is taken away, are the divine riches impoverished, or is God's arm weakened? Does he not continue in the same plenitude of power, in the same fulness of love, and grace, and compassion? Has he not said, "Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me?" (Jerem. xlix.) O, let us rest calmly on the power and grace of God; let his faithfulness banish every fear of unbelief; and let us "both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord!" (Lam. iii. 26.)

The Christian may be "willing rather" to die, if he reflects that "he that is dead is freed from sin." (Rom. vi. 7.) To be "absent from the body," is to be delivered from temptation, to be set free from the power of the "lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," to be exempt from wrath, envy, malice and every evil passion of the depraved heart, to cease from grieving the Holy Spirit of God, and from wounding the conscience, and breaking in upon that peace which passeth all understanding. We often lose the hope of immortality, by indulging in sin. It is fit that what perverts the true end of life, should also increase in us the fear of death; that what tends to obscure our evidences of being Christians, should also proportionably weaken in us the

hope of glory; that what makes our light of holiness dim, should also cloud our prospects of heaven—the region of perfect purity.

Reviewing these truths, the Christian will be led to unite diligence in his worldly vocation, and a proper attachment to all the endeared relations of life, and a due value and estimation of earthly blessings, with a “desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better.” (Phil. i. 23.) Hating sin, he cannot but long for that happy period when he shall no more make God angry. Rejoicing in the light of God’s countenance, he looks forward with earnest desires for that state, where no intervening clouds of sin shall ever hide from his glorified vision the face of God, whose glory is the light of heaven. Delighting to obey the will of his heavenly Father, he anticipates with daily pleasure the order, and holiness, and peace, and felicity of the “new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness;” (2 Pet. iii. 13.) and of that celestial city, in which “the nations of them which are saved, shall walk,” and into which “shall in no-wise enter any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination.” (Rev. xxi. 24, 27.) Seeking the divine glory, he continually prays, “Thy kingdom come;” and he is ever “looking for, and hasting unto the coming of the day of God,” (2 Pet. iii. 12.) when he hopes to “meet the Lord in the air,” and so to be “ever with the Lord.” (1 Thess. iv. 17.)

It is a high point of Christian attainment, to “use this world, as not abusing it;” (1 Cor. vii. 31.) to bear constantly in mind the circumstances and the end of our condition upon the earth, so as to discharge its duties without compromising our Christian character and obligations; to give all careful attention to “whatsoever things are true—honest—just—pure—lovely—of good report,” (Phil. iv. 8.) without forfeiting our title to the heavenly inheritance; to form earthly connexions, without dissolving our spiritual union with God and Christ; to possess worldly wealth and honour, without losing the better and durable riches of future glory; to be justly exalted in honourable estimation among men, without suffering depreciation in the all-important and eternally-decisive judgment of our Maker.

May we be enabled, through divine grace, to live here so as not to fall short of the gift of everlasting life in the world to come; and so to indulge the hope of heaven, as to seek the best evidence of our title to it in that faith which worketh by love,” (Gal. v. 6.) and maintaineth “good works;” (Titus iii. 8.) and to be ever looking, through the merits of our Redeemer alone, to “have right to the tree of life,”—(Rev. xxii. 14.) that when the dusky clouds of death shall be dispelled by the light of that day, which the shades of night will never close, we may “rise to the life immortal!”

It is a high point of Christian attainment to see this world as not abiding it. (1 Cor. vii. 31.) to bear constantly in mind the circumstances and the end of our condition upon the earth, so as to discharge its duties without complaining, our Christian character and obligations; to give our careful attention to "whatsoever things are true—nearest—just—lovely—of good report." (1 Tim. ii. 8.) without forgetting our life to the heavenly inheritance; to form earthly connections, without dissolving our spiritual union with God and Christ; to possess worldly wealth and honour, without losing the better and durable riches of future glory; to be justly exalted in honourable estimation among men, without suffering dishonour in the all-important and eternally decisive judgment of our Maker. May we be enabled, through divine grace, to live here so as not to fall short of the gift of everlasting life in the world to come; and so to imitate the hope of heaven, as to seek the best evidence of our title to it, in that faith which worketh by love." (Gal. v. 6.) and maintaineth "good works;" (Titus iii. 8.) and to be ever looking, through the merits of our Redeemer alone, to "have right to the tree of life."—(Rev. xii. 14.) that when the dusky clouds of death shall be dissipated by the light of that day, which the shades of night will never close, we may "see to the life immortal."

APPENDIX.

CHRISTIAN UNIFORMITY.

“Surely the present form of church government, which the laws of this land have established, is such, as no law of God, nor reason of man, hath hitherto been alleged of force sufficient to prove they do ill, who to the uttermost of their power withstand the alteration thereof.”

“But our trust in the Almighty is, that with us contentions are now at the highest float, and that the day will come, (for what cause of despair is there?) when the passions of former enmity being allayed, we shall with ten-times redoubled tokens of our unfeignedly-reconciled love, show ourselves towards each other the same with Joseph, and the brethren of Joseph were at the time of their interview in Egypt. Our comfortable expectation and most thirsty desire whereof, what man soever shall any way help to satisfy, the blessings of the God of peace, both in this world and in the world to come, be upon him more than the stars of the firmament in number.”—HOOKER.

WHEN we contemplate man, as a being capable of knowing and serving his Maker, but naturally ignorant both of the divine nature, and of the mode of religious service which would be acceptable to the Supreme Being, we may very justly conclude, that a system of religion, such as Christianity communicated from heaven for the benefit

of mankind, must be adapted to the whole human race. We may make this inference, not only from the consideration of the common origin of mankind,—the common relation which they sustain towards God,—their common prospects and destinies; but also from the unity of the divine nature, purpose, and counsel. Nothing changeable or contradictory can proceed from God; his dispensations may indeed vary in many circumstances so as to suit the degree of religious light which he has imparted,—to correspond with his eternal design in the government of the world, and to accord with the gradual developement of that design; but there will ever be found in them a perfect agreement in all the parts; a complete correspondence of institutions and articles of faith, with preceding appointments and communications; and an exact suitableness of the whole to the condition of man.

If uniformity could be found at all in a world composed of individuals, of similar natural rights, each having the same principle of self-love, and placed under the same law of moral obligation; we might reasonably expect to find it in articles of faith, and modes of worship, both professing to be derived originally from God, and to be sanctioned by the authority of a written Revelation. In matters which concern only worldly interests, and which must therefore very often interfere with and thwart each other, we might

conclude that where opposing interests were found, there would ensue a corresponding variety of sentiment, and action, and pursuit. But how shall we account for the diversity, the contrariety of opinions and practice, where the object is professedly the same ; where the source of information respecting the points in dispute is one ; and where the final appeal is in every case, and among every party, made to one common standard of religious belief and conduct—the Bible !—This diversity—in the extent to which it is carried—cannot be a just matter of indifference ; neither can it proceed from the right exercise of our mental faculties, but from the evil passions of the heart, from pride and vain-glory, from a rebellious desire to have some part and share in the government of the world, and a perverse disposition not to receive with humility and meekness the divine commands, nor to acknowledge the divine authority as Supreme.

The existence and long continuance of this diversity of religious belief, are not to be taken as proofs of its being a point of no essential importance in itself ; much less of its being agreeable to the divine will. The world seems never to have been free from this kind of dissension, because it has never been free from sin, since the transgression of our first parents. From the time that Cain refused to exercise faith in a Messiah that was to offer the sacrifice of himself, as an

atonement for mankind ; and in consequence of this unbelief, would not make the commanded offering of the life of an animal, as typical of the great sacrifice, that was to be offered up in the latter ages of the world,—from this period, there has existed in some degree, a struggle between the friends of truth and the advocates of error ; either on the one part as worshippers of the true God, and on the other as idolaters ; or as those who receive and obey the plain dictates of Scripture, on the one side, and on the other, those who profess to be in the bosom of the true Church, and yet obstinately resist the authority which has been delegated to that Church, by its Head and Founder, and who seek their own gratification, and follow their own notions, at the expense of the peace of the Church. So far from this disagreement, and this division, enjoying the approbation of heaven, it is expressly condemned in the Word of God. Uniformity both of belief and practice, in the great and essential articles of faith, and the duties of morality, is strictly enjoined in Scripture ; while at the same time a bigoted and uncharitable spirit, in relation to some minor points of discipline, of rite, and of ceremony, is rebuked and forbidden.

Love, that uniting bond of brotherhood, is most forcibly commanded to be cherished among Christians, by the Author and Finisher of their faith ; it is represented in the Word of God, as

the distinguishing evidence in Christians, of being members of the true spiritual Church of Christ; and as the first and chief test of obedience to the divine commands. The Apostles who heard the verbal instructions of our Lord, who partook in an extraordinary degree of his Spirit, and who devoted themselves to the extension and prosperity of his Church, uniformly enjoin a mild and forbearing disposition of mind towards each other; together with a firm and steadfast adherence to the great and fundamental doctrines of Christianity. We are never commanded to sacrifice truth on the altar of spurious candour and false liberality; or to compromise the immutable doctrines of our holy religion, for the sake of obtaining the countenance and support of the world. We are charged to "keep the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace;" (Eph. iv. 3.) but this does not imply that we are to give in to all the follies and fancies of superstition and enthusiasm, or to sanction all the irrational acts of fanaticism. This "*unity of the Spirit*," means a uniformity in the articles of faith, an agreement in all those points which are essential to the salvation of man. This is evident, from the exhortation of the same writer in another epistle, where he thus entreats the Corinthians to "keep the unity of the Spirit;" "I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, *that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you;*

but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." (1 Cor. i. 10.)

Such is human nature, that there will ever be a diversity of opinion in matters which are not demonstrable, although revealed from heaven. With respect to things that are capable of demonstration to the senses, all men will judge alike; but with regard to revelation, while the facts are not disputed which establish its authenticity, the precise meaning of the doctrines that are propounded, will ever be a subject of contention; because such is the uncertainty of language, that it seems impossible to convey exactly the same ideas to all persons, by words which are employed to express abstract truths. We cannot so definitely state articles of faith, as to prevent a diversity of interpretation. Some persons will narrow the signification of the terms used, and thereby limit the title to the benefits implied, to the few who constitute the party that receive the confined interpretation. And others will so extend the meaning of the terms, as to destroy all distinction between faith and unbelief, and to enrol all men among the true and acceptable worshippers of the Deity, whether they bow in adoration to

"Jehovah, Jove, or Lord."

So that we should be careful, in framing articles

of faith, not to exclude from the rank and title of Christians, all who do not hold them to the same extent, and in the same interpretation as ourselves, as though the Word of God had come exclusively to us. (1 Cor. xiv. 36.)

There may be a great diversity of merely religious opinion, of notions which involve no capital article of faith, but relate merely to some point of discipline or church-government, some minor consideration of rite and ceremony, with respect to which we are charged to walk "with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love." (Eph. iv. 2.) But while we exercise this mutual forbearance, we must also carefully avoid a counterfeit kind of liberality, which leads men to look on religious dissensions of all kinds with indifference; and to regard the most conflicting and opposite articles of faith, and the most absurd modes of religious worship, as alike acceptable to God.—There are plain and unalterable bounds between truth and error; and a disregard to the progress of the latter, will infallibly end in renunciation of the former. In fact, an indifference to error implies a contempt of truth. The friends of truth must be the enemies of falsehood; they cannot look on it with apathy and unconcern. If there be (as we are assured) "one Lord, one faith, one baptism;" (Eph. iv. 5.) then these form the cardinal articles of religious belief; and every notion

derogatory to the character and perfections of this "Lord,"—every sentiment deviating from this "faith,"—every profession at variance with this "baptism," is a departure from Truth; and men cannot be at liberty to alter the unity of faith and practice which the Bible enjoins, nor can opposing creeds be alike acceptable to God.—Still, we must not confound the essentials of religion, with those comparatively unimportant additions of form and ceremony, which the wisdom and piety of our ancestors judged assistant to the beauty and order of public worship, and helpful to the devotion of the worshippers. These additions, though allowed to be of human appointment, and therefore of little moment when contrasted with the "weightier matters of law, judgment, mercy, and faith," (Matt. xxiii. 23.) yet are not the gaudy trappings of pride and ambition, nor the mere tinsel of sanctimonious hypocrisy; but the result of the high advancements in knowledge, and the eminent attainments in piety of our forefathers; and having stood the test of long experience, as to their utility, they are not to be left "undone," nor hastily given up at the call of mere cavil and litigious scrupulosity.

If we as members of the Church of England, are firm in maintaining the whole of the wise and salutary discipline of our Church, let not those who differ from us in their opinions on these points, object that we wish to impose on them

those rites and ceremonies which we must allow not to be of divine institution. We hold them as valuable appendages to our mode of worship, and to the government of the Church, of which we desire to be obedient and useful members; and they are no where inhibited in Scripture, either directly or by implication; nor are they in any wise at variance with Scriptural commands. On the contrary, our obedience and subjection to them, is sanctioned by that Scriptural authority, which enjoins us to “know them which are over” us “in the Lord, and admonish” us; “and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake.” (1 Thess. v. 12, 13.) And whenever the “unity of the Spirit,” is the first object with Christians of the same language and the same country, the “bond of peace” will easily enclose all those who, “holding the head,” desire the peace and prosperity of the Church; nor will such esteem as a yoke of bondage, those rites and ceremonies which have been, and still are, the objects of unjust misrepresentation, or of groundless alarm. A general agreement with the commands and the spirit of Scripture, or an opposition to the plain dictates of the Bible, and an incongruity with the testimony of inspiration, must be our guides to ascertain when we are called upon to “stand fast, and hold the traditions which we have been taught,” (2 Thess. ii. 15.) or to reject those things which “might bring us

into bondage," and to give no "place" to them "by subjection, no not for an hour, that the truth of the Gospel" may continue with us. (Gal. ii. 4, 5.)

When St. Paul says "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind," (Rom. xiv. 5.) he does not mean that the private judgment of every individual is to be the rule of interpretation of doctrine and of observance of discipline; for in this case, the church would present only a scene of disorder. What men believe, and what they practise, ought to be only what they think in their hearts to be according to God's Word; but they are not to set up their own private judgment as the rule of interpretation. They are to submit to lawful authority—to the decision of the Church, so that they may "follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another." (Rom. xiv. 19.)—In all points of law, and in cases which require the aid of medicine, men consult those who have devoted their time and attention to the study of these sciences; and they submit to be guided by them, as being their superiors in knowledge in these points; but in religion, by falsely interpreting the command of the Apostle to be fully persuaded in their own minds, they refuse to yield to the decisions of those, whom God has set over them as instructors; and because they feel that they stand in the same need, and have the same claim on the blessings

of the Gospel, as all other men, they will not take the sense of Scripture, where there is any difficulty, from those who have made the Scriptures the study of their lives, nor submit to be guided in matters of rite and ceremony by the antient customs of the Church ; but presume to dictate where they should humbly ask instruction, and to innovate where they ought to obey the established rule and order.

In so essential a point as the knowledge of God, he cannot have left man to frame his own articles of faith ; and in so important a duty as the worship of God, he cannot have left him intirely destitute of some rule and guidance ; or man would invent and impose the most cruel and absurd rites, as we see to have been the case in our own land, before the light of divine Revelation shone upon us. The Bible defines clearly every point necessary to our salvation ; but as religion finds men living, according to the original design of their Creator, in society, and under the obligation of many social duties, which cannot be separated from the duties more immediately arising out of the service of God,—and as religion is designed for man, as subject to these civil obligations, there must be human interference in the management of all its secular concerns. It is so closely connected with all our duties as rulers and subjects, as fathers and children, as masters and servants, and has so powerful an influence over the due discharge of all these relations, that the silence of

the Bible is easily accounted for, with respect to the specific government of the internal discipline of a Church, further than defining the spiritual authority of the teachers of religion, and urging the willing obedience of the members to those who are "over" them "in the Lord;" and with respect to the appointment of the mode and times of worship, further than commanding the offering up of prayers and thanksgivings, the teaching of men in the knowledge of the doctrines, and in the observance of the morality of the Gospel.

We have no specific directions given in the Scriptures, as to any peculiar mode of Church discipline, of rite and of ceremony; because the chief design of revelation is to make men wise unto salvation. The great question is—What is the ground of our hope of salvation? And this being answered according to the faith of Jesus Christ, all other things relating to the government of the Church, and the order of public worship, are left to be regulated by the proper authorities, according to what is most expedient, and best adapted to promote edification. Modern innovators would do well to ask themselves, how the Church of God subsisted for so many ages without those new articles of faith, and new modes of worship, which they contend to be essential to the true understanding and right reception of the Gospel. Such persons seem not aware of the arrogance which they exhibit, in claiming to be

wiser and more pious than all the Christians of former generations. Because they fancy that they have framed a more Scriptural creed, and a more Scriptural discipline, they unite the cause of religion with their own institutions, and suppose that they must stand or fall together.

The Bible is given to direct our faith, and not to furnish us with minute instructions for the discipline and order of a Church. Where human reason would avail, Revelation is silent. Much is therefore left to be arranged according to particular circumstances. The interests of religion must be promoted by a unity of practice, as well as of faith,—by a uniformity of discipline, as well as an agreement of doctrine ; and these points cannot be secured without a national establishment, to superintend the secular government of the Church, as well as to appoint and oversee proper persons for the teaching and enforcement of the doctrines of Christianity. A national establishment for these ends, may be maintained, not only without infringing on any of the laws of the New Testament, with regard to the unchanging articles of faith, and the direct and positive appointments of God in the ordinances of the Gospel ; but also in perfect accordance with the grand and distinguishing characteristics of Christianity.

The authority of Scripture should be the basis of every religious and civil institution ; that is,

there should be a general agreement and consistency with the scope and spirit of Revelation. The same Word of God which furnishes us with the doctrines of our religion, should also sanction in its general and implied testimony, (wherever there is no direct command,) every mode and form which binds society. The prosperity of religion, and the true interests of a well-regulated state, can never be at variance : on the contrary, the Providence of God has made the latter dependent on the former. We ought, therefore, to rejoice that in our land, this mutual subserviency is promoted by the union of church and state. The maintenance of the rites and service of the church, the support of its ministers, and the defence of its privileges, are the legitimate objects of the care of the State. And the perpetuity of law, and the preservation of order in civil society, are promoted by the influence of that holy religion, which the Church inculcates.—We acknowledge but one spiritual head of the Church, even Christ ; but we acknowledge, with Scriptural obedience, “ the King as supreme.” When the Church of God existed only in heathen lands, there was an opposition between its interests and the principles of the rulers of those countries. But under Christian governments, civil laws are sanctioned and supported by divine laws ; and, rulers being subject to the same laws, he who presides over the civil power, is wisely appointed

to have also the pre-eminence in ecclesiastical jurisdiction.

The argument against a National Establishment for uniformity of religious faith and worship, grounded on the fact that, at its first introduction into the world, Christianity neither sought nor received the support of the existing authorities, and that in the days of the apostles, there was no union between the Church and the governments of the countries where the gospel was introduced, is rendered null and without force, from the consideration that in those days, there were no Christian governors. "The principles of the doctrine of Christ," and the sentiments and practice of the pagan kingdoms then existing, were as opposite as heaven and hell; and the religion of Jesus was to be established and supported, in direct opposition to the idolatrous rites and systems of the heathen world. But where Christianity is the religion of a country, there is a natural union of the Church and the State; the latter seeking a confirmation of its authority, in the holy sanctions of the Church. In our own country these have been so blended, that the terms Church and State are almost convertible; and the security of the latter will always be found to depend on the maintenance of the former. While the bond of union is preserved, by the continuance of our establishment for the support of religion, the civil government is guaranteed; but

whenever dissension in matters of discipline, and diversity in points of faith, shall become general, anarchy will be let loose in all our civil institutions. Sound reasoning would lead us to expect this result; and woful experience has shown that rebellion and schism—when that schism is founded on litigious scrupulosity—go hand in hand. The altar and the throne must stand or fall together; and therefore while the latter is the object of our lively solicitude, and of our warm affection, we must be careful never to promote in any degree a departure from the former, in faith or in discipline; lest it lead to an alienation of heart from our lawful rulers, and a defection of duty in our civil capacities. Where the religion of men consists wholly, or chiefly, in hostility to the established Church, there will be a correspondent hatred of the rulers, and a rebellious resistance to the laws of the land.

There is not a more difficult exercise of power, than that which is called to take cognizance of the interests of religion; to regulate the discipline of a Church, which is to receive a nation into its bosom; to state and define those articles of faith, which shall evidently carry on them the stamp of genuine Scriptural origin; and to appoint those modes of worship, and that order and discipline, which shall possess a manifest accordance with the spirit and scope of Revelation. The chief difficulty in this case, arises from the fact, that

the Scriptures are addressed to all men, and are consequently liable to almost as great a diversity of interpretation, as there are individual possessors of the Scriptures. Although the Bible is wonderfully adapted to the condition of every man, yet peculiarity of temper and inclination, or neglect or prejudice of education, leads to interpretations as conflicting and opposed as the passions and interests of men. Our duty and our happiness, therefore, unite in urging us to cleave with steadfastness, to that established religion in creed and in order, which the labours of disinterested piety and learning have founded on an interpretation of Scripture, which no man can justly gainsay.

But there is another difficulty in this case, which arises from the natural rights of conscience. Every man being accountable to God for his faith and practice, it seems unreasonable and unjust, that any one should be compelled by the united force of others, to adopt a creed and a mode of worship to which he feels conscientious objections. But in regulating a National Church, compulsion is not necessarily employed towards any man ; nor is any inroad made on that sacred responsibility which, in matters of religion, subsists between man and God, and not between man and man ; except in-so-far as every one is accountable to society, for the proper discharge of the duties devolving on him as a member of the social compact. The moral character of a

man will be estimated in the judgment of his Maker, not merely by the religious sentiments which he holds, and the conduct which those sentiments sanction and produce, but also by the advantages enjoyed by every individual for attaining right notions in religion, and consequently arriving at a right and holy practice.— There is a great difference between trenching on the natural rights of conscience, and merely insisting on the proper observance of certain institutions, and the maintenance of certain articles of faith, which are either of divine origin, or which have had the approbation of the wisest and best of men. And these institutions and these articles, are not attempted to be imposed on all, but only on those who voluntarily continue in that Church, in which they are considered to promote the harmony and spiritual edification of its members.

What are justly called the rights of conscience, ought ever to be respected ; but then we must carefully ascertain what are the due and proper objects of the rights of conscience, and the proper sphere of their operation. Some men call that an infringement on the rights of conscience, which is only the exercise by some other persons, in a way which they believe to be good and proper, of the same right to which the objectors themselves lay claim. These men, in their jealous care of their own rights, interfere with the

equally sacred rights of others ; and while most unyielding in every point of discipline, and every article of faith, peculiar to their own communion, call those persons bigots who merely display a firm adherence to what they believe to be the truth. They expect others to be yielding, and ready to sacrifice any point to their selfish demands,—to be so *liberal* as to suffer any change, any encroachment, which these advocates of what they are pleased to call unshackled liberty of conscience, may choose to make. We must be wholly regardless of the interests of our own community, lest they should clash with the rights of these men's *tender consciences* ;—these men, who call on others to be *candid* and *liberal*, while they themselves arrogate infallibility, deem every thing unscriptural which is opposed to their judgment and notions, and indulge the worst spirit of bigotry, while they are professing to countenance and exercise true christian charity.

Uniformity in discipline is certainly productive of edification ; and if it can be found in any church, which receives the Bible as the ground of its articles of faith, we are bound to remain in the communion of that church, and not to trouble its peace by schisms, generated by our own conceit and impatience of the yoke of authority. The evils of a contrary conduct are visible in the lamentable divisions of the religious parties of this country. Those who are most clamorous for re-

form in the Church of England, and who renounce their allegiance to her dominion, have ever been, and always will be far enough from agreeing among themselves, as to any uniform order of discipline. Among them, every teacher either exercises the authority, to which he objects when vested in the National Church, or he is compelled to conform to the order which his hearers choose to prescribe; and to preach that doctrine only to which they are predisposed to listen.

Where conscientious objections are felt against the doctrine or discipline of the Established Church; separation from the communion of that Church is neither forbidden nor prevented; but it ought to take place only after diligent inquiry, and serious investigation of the motives which prompt to such a step. A numerous attendance of worshippers is highly desirable, for the sake of peace as well as of religious advantages; but sincere worshippers only are desired, and not those who assemble by compulsion. It is earnestly to be wished that the religious service of a congregation, should not only be uniform, but also unanimous. No one who understands and respects the rights of conscience, (and in this happy land, they are both understood and respected to the utmost degree,) will wish that any man should be constrained to utter the words of a creed, to which his heart cannot give full assent; or that he should be subject to a discipline, and mode of

worship, to which he cannot conform (at least during his present state of information,) without doing violence to his conscience. Uniformity gives up its claims, when "unity of spirit" is in question. The "bond of peace" has respect to the conscience of individuals, as well as to the mutual agreement of religious societies. But the question of continuance in the bosom of the United Church, or of withdrawment from her communion, is too generally regarded as a mere matter of opinion, as an indifferent act; as though conformity were not connected with any moral obligation, and as though separation, (where the voice of conscience is not the sole prompter,) involved in it no violation of moral duty. Those who dissent from the national Church solely from conscientious motives, are never found to be enemies and haters of that Church. Their chief object is the promotion of true religion; they act on the broad principle of Christianity, and not on the narrow feeling of party spirit. To see men Christians, is their main purpose, and not members of their communion in particular. Such a separation as this, is not schism; it does not involve any disruption of the sacred ties of charity; nor does it place an insuperable obstacle in the way of eventual reunion.

We are commanded to "keep the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace;" which seems to imply that a uniformity of judgment and practice,

should be maintained by the common sacrifice of some individual peculiarity on the part of all, for the sake of peace. There are certain great and fundamental doctrines, and certain eternal principles of morality, which are never to be compromised nor deteriorated ; but there are also many points of mere opinion—subservient perhaps to the benefit of those who hold them, but not absolutely imperative on all—which may be retained or renounced according to circumstances, and which ought always to give place when the peace of the Church is thereby questioned. We are bound not to cause or to join needless separations from the Established Church of our country. Where the “unity of the Spirit” can be preserved, “the bond of peace” must not be violated. Blind adherence to a Church, notwithstanding its manifest departure from Scripture, and its usurpation of Scriptural authority, while its tenets are at variance with the plain language of Scripture, is not required of any man. A Church that cannot abide the most rigid investigation of its capital articles of faith, according to the doctrines of the Word of God, is not the true Church of Christ ; and we are bound to renounce communion with such a Church. We are not to call any man *master*, who presumes to establish his own dogmas as articles of faith ; but if we find a Church resting on the foundation of Christ ; built up in the doctrines of the Apostles ; sup-

ported by the tried faith and love of holy martyrs ; in which full provision is made for the dispensing of all the means of grace ; venerable for its antiquity, and for the solemnity and simplicity of its ritual ; amiable for the mildness and gentleness of its spirit, and the exercise of its authority ; pure, and holy, and steadfast in its principles ; firm and inflexible, but not uncharitable, in its adherence to a Scriptural faith ;—if we find a Church combining in itself all these great and desirable advantages—and such a one is the Established Church of England—it is both our duty and our privilege, to be true in our personal allegiance to that Church. The “unity of the Spirit,” which consolidates that Church, should be maintained with watchful care against the encroachments of designing enemies, and against the laxity and indifference of pretended friends. The “bond of peace,” which unites in one tie of affectionate attachment, of doctrinal agreement, and of consentient discipline, all the members of that Church, should be so strengthened and confirmed, as to resist the efforts of those who would with open violence snap it asunder, or the artful and secret machinations of others, who by gradually separating its “threefold cord,” would eventually dissolve the connexion, and disperse its now united brotherhood into all the thousand varied and contradictory parties of sect and of schism.

To “keep the unity of the Spirit, in the bond

of peace," we must "bear the infirmities" of others; (Rom. xv. 1.) we must pass by many things which do not "please ourselves," but which please our neighbour, and we must do this out of regard to his edification.—In forming a judgment of the religious notions of others, we ought carefully to investigate the motives of human actions. Our peculiar circumstances often make us unfit judges of the conduct of other men; because we cannot enter into their feelings, nor understand the secret and hidden causes which influence their affections, and bias their judgments. Early associations, precept, example, confirm men in habits which were not at first voluntarily formed; and which are continued without any inquiry as to their nature and tendency.—Early religious impressions are not easily effaced; and all the appendages of religion, both with respect to the forms of public worship, and the manner of private devotion, are regarded with some degree of veneration, as deriving a portion of sanctity from their connexion with the service of God, and their reference to his commands. This may account for the peaceable disposition towards each other, of many whose notions of religion are at variance, and for the indifference of others; they have not adopted their sentiments from conviction, but have been trained up in them from their infancy; their ideas have expanded only in the proportion that the early shackles of

education have permitted ; their minds have been fashioned by external influence, not by internal meditation ; their knowledge has been imparted to them by others, not acquired by their own study and pursuit. Thus they rather consider themselves to be in the right, than condemn others as holding erroneous sentiments ; or they look on all opinions as possessing equal claims to truth, and on all practice as alike acceptable to God.

But this negative sort of charity, is not a Scriptural principle ; this indifference is criminal, and leads to the subversion of all religion. While we exercise Christian forbearance towards others, and refrain from harsh censures, and arrogant condemnation of all who differ from us in minor points of discipline, or the lighter shades of religious belief,—and while we allow that the universal Parent loves all his creatures, and that “ in every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him ;” (Acts x. 35.) it is nevertheless a duty incumbent on all, to endeavour to “ keep the unity of the Spirit,” and not to countenance strifes and needless divisions in the Church of God. A peaceful brotherhood of Christians, must be pleasing in the sight of God ; and that this brotherhood may subsist, and spread, and become general, each member of it must drop some claim ; give up some pretension ; yield to some influence ; sacrifice some prejudice ; acknowledge some superiority

of wisdom, of piety, of spiritual attainment in another. The religion which proceeds from the Spirit, must have the fruits of the Spirit; and one of the most eminent of these is Peace. But the religion of some persons seems to have no due regard to peace, either of a family or of a Church. When the service of God and of the world are set before us, and we must choose one or the other, the path of duty is plain; but when under pretence of serving God with greater purity and acceptance, we disregard the unity of a family, and break through every tie of friendship and of kindred, and violate the peace of the Church, we are not keeping, but dissolving the "unity of the Spirit."

An over-scrupulous conscience may lead us, on our first serious inquiry into religion, to disapprove of many things, which an increase of knowledge will show to be neither hazardous to our sincerity, nor dangerous to our security. We may be induced by the narrowness of our notions, or the small degree of our religious information, to withdraw from a religious community; a close and endeared union with which, subsequent attainments will prove to be not only our duty, but a privilege and advantage tending to advance our best interests. A just regard to the "bond of peace," will be the best preservative from schismatic divisions, and sectarian parties. The "unity of the Spirit" will teach us to regard the religion of

the Scriptures, as designed for all mankind, and not confined to any one nation, or society of men.

The Christian religion is properly the *religion of mankind* ; adapted to every one of the family of man. It is not a dispensation to be modelled according to the manners and customs of the people where it is promulgated, but designed to assimilate all to itself; it does not grow old with the perishing things of time, and require to be renovated so as to suit the succeeding ages of the world and the passing generations of men ; it is one, it is the “unity of the Spirit,” and is adapted to every age and to all people. A sectarian spirit may divide the religious world into numerous parties ; and sectarian distinctions may assign a peculiar characteristic to each party ; each sect may claim the exclusive possession of truth, and circumscribe its narrow pale as the only ground of safety,—but the Gospel disclaims all respect of persons. “The mighty God, even the Lord, hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the Sun, unto the going down thereof:”—(Psalm l. 1.)—the offer of pardon and eternal life is made to every individual of the human race ; humanity is a sufficient claim ; misery, sin, and helplessness, are the best titles to warrant an application to the divine favour. The Spirit of God is ready to assist the infirmities of all that supplicate his influence. A salvation is provided by

God himself, fully adequate to meet the case of every wretched sinner; the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin; his sacrifice was an oblation for the sins of the whole world; it possessed merit infinite, merit sufficient to atone for all transgressions, and to impart its cleansing, its healing, its peace-speaking efficacy to every soul that applies in faith for a share in its propitiatory virtue.

May He, who gives to every member of his Church, grace according to his own good pleasure, and who has ordained various orders in his Church, "apostles, prophets, and evangelists, pastors and teachers," "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ," (Eph. iv. 7—12.)—May He so maintain among us that brotherly love, which is at once a divine gift and the best evidence of divine favour; that laying aside all "bitter envying and strife," we may grow in the "wisdom that is from above, pure, peaceable, gentle;" (James iii. 14—17.) and at length may "all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

THE END.

ERRATA.

Page.	Line.
2,	16, after <i>God</i> , insert —
31,	27, for <i>Scriptual</i> , read Scriptural.
112,	18, dele <i>out</i>
162,	15, for <i>a perpetual</i> , read perpetually.
225,	11, dele <i>one</i> .
276,	5, dele the hyphen after <i>firmly</i> .
310,	14, for <i>makest</i> , read makes.
352,	26, put a comma after <i>indifference</i> .

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